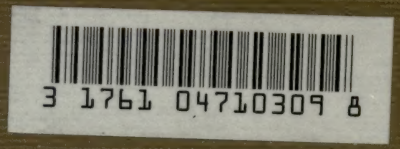
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HANDBOUND
AT THE

SELECTIONS

FROM THE

EDINBURGH REVIEW;

COMPRISING

THE BEST ARTICLES IN THAT JOURNAL,

FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH

A PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION,

AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.

EDITED BY MAURICE CROSS,

SECRETARY TO THE BELFAST HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1833.

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PREFACE.

THE plan and contents of the following work are so fully detailed in the Preliminary Dissertation, that it only remains to explain the circumstances under which it is offered to the public. The Editor, having been for many years a reader and an admirer of the Edinburgh Review, has frequently regretted that no selection had been made of its most valuable articles on Literature, Philosophy, and Politics. The idea suggested itself, that these, if properly chosen, and separated from all extraneous matter, would form a publication of considerable interest and utility to those persons, especially, who have not the good fortune to possess a copy of the original.

That a judicious selection from a work of so voluminous a nature, and embracing so great a diversity of subjects, could not be made without considerable labour, may be easily conceived. The Editor was oppressed by the abundance of materials; and the difficulty of selection was increased by the general excellence of the articles among which he had to choose. He excluded from his plan those which referred to temporary topics; but, even after this was done, he was frequently at a loss what to insert, and what to leave out. His object was to embody in these Selections the best papers in the Review, particularly those of permanent interest, or likely to attract the greatest number of readers. Whether he has succeeded the public will decide. Those best acquainted with the diversified contents of the original work, will probably be the least disposed to censure his defects.

As the articles comprise discussions on a variety of important questions, they are distributed under appropriate heads, without

regard to the time of their publication in the Review. The number of the volume and page from which each disquisition has been taken is stated in notes. References are also occasionally made to articles which could not be reprinted for want of space. To the reader these will afford facilities in referring to the original work, the value of which cannot be depreciated by any abridgement of its contents, however ample. In addition to a Table of Contents, there is an Analytical Index, at the end of the Fourth Volume, which will be found both copious and accurate.

The Editor confidently expects that these volumes will meet with a favourable reception. The celebrity of the authors, the variety of the style, and the attraction of the subjects, can hardly fail to procure for them abundance of readers.

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PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION

ON

THE PROGRESS OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE;

AND

THE HISTORY, PRINCIPLES, AND TENDENCY

OF

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

THE publication of the Edinburgh Review has been justly regarded as forming an important epoch in the history of periodical literature. No critical and political journal ever obtained so brilliant a celebrity, or gave so powerful an impulse to public opinion. That its merits may be properly appreciated, it will be necessary, before making any observations on its history and principles, to give a brief sketch of the most distinguished works of the kind by which it was preceded, and to advert to those circumstances, in the intellectual and political condition of society, previously to its appearance, that contributed to its success.

The origin of reviewing has been traced to Photius. His "Bibliotheca" resembled, in some degree, the early English Reviews, which aspired to no higher merit than that of giving extracts from new books. It consisted exclusively of abridged notices of the works he had read during his embassy in Persia, and was not designed to perform the office of a critical journal. France has the honour of giving birth to this species of publication. Denis de Sallo, a counsellor in the parliament of Paris, and a man of eminent literary attainments, established, in 1655, a Review, — the "Journal des Sçavans," — on the plan of those which exist at present. It was a weekly publication, and contained reviews of the most popular and distinguished productions in every department of literature. The style of criticism was bold and sarcastic, and exposed the editor to the resentment of the authors he held up to ridicule. To shield himself from the personal attacks to which the severity of his criticisms made him liable, De Sallo published his Journal in the name of Sieur de Hédouville, his footman. For a considerable time, he conducted it without any assistance from his literary friends; but, as he proceeded in his labours, he found

it necessary to seek for contributions from others, and selected, as his coadjutors, some of the most learned men in France. The originality and critical acumen displayed in the work attracted general admiration. Its circulation extended to several countries of Europe; it was translated into various languages, and imitated by the literati.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented popularity which Sallo acquired as a reviewer, the asperity of his articles provoked a fierce opposition. Those who most admired the graces of his style and the playfulness of his wit, were loudest in their complaints of the despotical power he assumed. D'Israeli, in his "Curiosities of Literature," observes, that "after having published only the third volume of his journal, the editor felt the irritated wasps of literature thronging so thick about him, that he very gladly abandoned the throne of criticism." There are good grounds, however, for believing that the discontinuance of this excellent publication was occasioned by the intrigues of a party, who had sufficient influence at court to procure a decree ordering it to be relinquished.

The impression which it made on the public mind was not speedily effaced, and it was resumed by the Abbé Gallois. He wielded the critical sceptre with greater moderation than his predecessor. To secure popularity by gentleness and impartiality, in the discharge of his important functions, was laudable in a writer who wished to guide the taste of the community; but, having been accustomed to the raillery and pungent sarcasms of an abler master of the art, they were dissatisfied with a dry analysis of works, and a collection of extracts. In consequence, the "Journal des Sçavans," under its new conductor, did not produce the same effect as when superintended by its founder.

In 1674 the Abbé de la Roque succeeded his friend Gallois, and carried on the Review for nine years, when it passed into the hands of M. Cousin. He conducted it with considerable ability till 1702; it then became the property of a society established by the Abbé Bignon, under whose management it assumed a new form, and maintained, for a number of years, a high reputation as a valuable depository of scientific and literary knowledge.*

Bayle commenced, in March 1684, the "Nouvelles de la Ré-

* An interesting account of the *Journal des Sçavans* will be found in the Rev. Henry Stebbing's "Lectures on Periodical Literature," published in the *Athenæum* for 1828. (See Nos. 18. 20. 22. 24. 26. 28., which contain the whole of that gentleman's contributions on the subject.) His enquiries into the progress and tendency of periodical composition, from its first rude commencement to its present state, evince accurate and extensive research. His remarks on the character of our most popular literary journals are conspicuous for discrimination and candour; nor is he less deserving of praise for his correct estimate of the value of Reviews, and his exposition of the principles upon which they should be conducted. D'Israeli, in his "Curiosities of Literature," has given a few additional particulars respecting the project of De Sallo, and the progress of literary journals in France.

publique des Lettres," a monthly journal formed on the model of the "Journal des Sçavans." It affords a favourable specimen of the versatile talents of its conductor. His unrivalled learning, brilliant wit, and easy style, eminently qualified him to impart an agreeable variety and interest to a publication of this description. He possessed many advantages to which most of his predecessors and contemporaries had no claim. His fame as an author was permanently established. With many, indeed, his principles were not popular; but all admired the erudition and talent displayed in their advocacy. His "News from the Republic of Letters" was warmly supported by the public, and may still be resorted to as a rich source of amusement and instruction. His labours as a critic terminated in consequence of indisposition brought on by incessant mental exertion, in 1687. The Review was continued by his friends Bernard and M. de la Roque, but not with the same *éclat*. At a subsequent period, its management was given to Basnage, who acted as editor for several years. He changed its name to "Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans." Under his superintendence it was peculiarly successful, and extended to thirteen volumes. Its subsequent history is doubtful. The probability is, that it was incorporated with some other literary journal.

The example of Sallo gave an impulse to periodical literature on the Continent. In a few years the leading capitals of Europe were supplied with Reviews, to which the first scholars of the age sent contributions. Of these an enumeration might be given; but it is intended, as being more compatible with the design of the present Essay, to limit this sketch of the origin and progress of reviewing to a short notice of those publications which owe their existence to British enterprise and talent.

It would have been singular, had England, with her unlimited command of able writers in every department of science and literature, not assisted in the establishment of a class of works the influence of which has been so extensively beneficial. She soon entered with eagerness into this newly opened field of speculation. It appears, however, that her first attempts at periodical criticism were exceedingly imperfect. The early English Reviews did not embrace so wide a range as their precursors in France and Germany. They were little more than advertisements of new works, with a series of extracts clumsily put together,—a sort of *catalogue raisonné* to which book collectors might refer before adding to their libraries. Mr. Nichols, the industrious compiler of the "Literary Anecdotes," has mentioned the first publication of this description that appeared in London. It was called "Weekly Memorials, or an Account of Books lately set forth," and commenced in January, 1688. It is not stated at what period it was discontinued, or whether it possessed any merit. The journals which speedily followed can scarcely be classed amongst regular Reviews. As records of the progress of literature they are of some

value but are destitute of the interest arising from original disquisitions on the works noticed. The following is a list of the most important:—"The Censura Temporum," established in 1708, and the "Bibliotheca Curiosa," about the same time, gave notices of a few remarkable publications, and selections from foreign journals. They were followed by the "Memoirs of Literature," 8 vols. octavo, 1722; "New Memoirs of Literature, by Michael de la Roche," begun in January, 1725, and ended December, 1727, 6 vols.; "Present State of the Republic of Letters, by Andrew Reid," commenced in January, 1728, ended December, 1736, 18 vols.; "Historia Literaria, by Archibald Bower," begun in 1730, ended 1732, 4 vols.; "Literary Journal," printed at Dublin, begun 1744, and ended June, 1749, 5 vols.

The system of criticism now so popular was first adopted in the "Monthly Review." This old and respectable journal was established in 1749 by Ralph Griffith, Esq.,—a gentleman universally esteemed for his literary attainments, liberal opinions, and moral worth. He discharged the duties of editor for upwards of half a century. Those acquainted with the work, whilst under his judicious management, will acknowledge the literary talent and political honesty by which it was distinguished. In 1803, Mr. Griffith, junior, succeeded his father as editor, and continued his labours till May, 1825, when indisposition compelled him to relinquish a situation he occupied with honour to himself and advantage to the public. The different series of the "Monthly Review" contain a vast accumulation of general knowledge, and many admirable specimens of philosophical and impartial criticism. It was the first journal which skilfully combined an analysis of books, with critical strictures on their character, and the topics of which they treated. Disquisitions on the subjects of works were only occasionally introduced; and were contributed by men of established celebrity in the republic of letters. The criticisms were, in general, neither too brief nor too elaborate; but gave a fair abstract of an author's productions, accompanied by a discriminating commentary on their excellencies and defects. Though the "Monthly" has not maintained the same lofty ground as the "Edinburgh" and "Quarterly Reviews" in learned and profound discussion, it has occasionally sent forth articles of great attraction and permanent value. Its views on political subjects were always comprehensive and enlightened, and advocated, under circumstances the most discouraging, with firmness, talent, and integrity. On questions of a religious nature it was favourable to the opinions of the unitarian party; but its support was the result of conviction, and invariably rendered in a tolerant spirit. The rights of conscience were strenuously defended by its conductors. Persecution was never justified in the name of religion, nor disabilities, whether civil or political, vindicated as necessary to the existence of the British constitution. Upon the whole, it may be

said with truth of this useful journal, that, for a period exceeding seventy years, it has been the "steady and independent advocate of the general interests of literature, of moral virtue, of political freedom and religious liberty, unawed by the threatening aspect of the worst of times, and unseduced by the allurements of days of peace and pleasure, which it has been alike its fortune to witness in its protracted career." *

The success of the "Monthly Review" led to the establishment of several other critical journals. The rapidity with which they followed each other may be regarded as a proof of a growing taste for such publications. When authors were few, books rare, and the great majority of the nation without the means of instruction, the want of Reviews was not felt. They are the offspring of an improved state of society, and their progress has kept pace with the advancement of knowledge. It will be found, therefore, that from the period when the "Monthly Review" entered on its career, periodical criticism assumed a more important character, and was sought after with greater avidity.

About a year after Mr. Griffith commenced his work, Dr. Matthew Maty published the first number of the "Journal Britannique," which he continued for five years. It came out every two months at the Hague, and contained an account, in French, of the principal books published in England. It met with a favourable reception, and exhibited extensive literary information. Dr. Maty was originally a physician at Leyden, and settled in England in 1740. The learning and genius of which his journal afforded unequivocal proofs, recommended him to the most eminent scholars and writers of that day. To this connection he was indebted for his appointment of under-librarian to the British Museum, at its first institution in 1753; and in 1772 for the office of principal librarian. The "Journal Britannique," though unequal in critical talent to many of its successors, did credit to the research, taste, and judgment of its editor.

It has been remarked, that an intimate connection has always existed between the progress of periodical literature and the spirit of the times. The history of Scotch Reviews and Magazines affords many striking proofs of this observation. Edinburgh has been long celebrated for the variety and importance of its literary and scientific institutions, the reputation of its men of letters, and the intelligence of its population. These circumstances will account satisfactorily for the number of periodical publications to which that city has given birth, and which have been supported by its most eminent writers.

It is an interesting fact, that the "Edinburgh Review" was the title of the first journal published in Scotland exclusively devoted to criticism. The gentlemen by whom it was projected and con-

* Preface to vol. cvi. of the Monthly Review.

ducted afterwards rose to the highest distinction in the literary world. The names of Adam Smith, Dr. Robertson, Lord Chancellor Roslyn, Dr. Blair, and several other writers of note, are associated with this remarkable work. It contains the earliest efforts of the author of the "Wealth of Nations," and of the historian of America.

The design of the Review, as expressed in the original Preface, was to "lay before the public, from time to time, a view of the progressive state of learning in Scotland; to give a full account of all books published there within the compass of half a year; and to take some notice of such books published elsewhere as are most read in this country, or seem to have any title to draw the public attention." Only two numbers were published, in July, 1755, and January, 1756. The circumstance of the authors not being known gave an interest to the Review, exclusive of the talent displayed in its management. Eight articles, of which six are on historical subjects, were from the pen of Dr. Robertson. Among the contributions of Adam Smith, the review of Johnson's Dictionary attracted most attention. Dr. Blair wrote several literary criticisms; and Mr. Jardine, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, reviewed works on theology. It may appear strange that David Hume, the friend and associate of the eminent persons engaged in this undertaking, and whose splendid talents would have increased its reputation, had no share in its management, nor even knew the names of the writers. Prudential considerations influenced the conductors in excluding him from any knowledge of their proceedings. When the Review came out, Scotland was agitated by religious dissensions. The orthodox party had taken alarm at the philosophical writings of Hume. Under such circumstances, it would have been most unwise had the Editors admitted an avowed Deist into their literary counsels, especially after having, in their Prefatory Address, stated their determination to oppose, at all times, irreligious doctrines.*

* The late Mr. Mackenzie, in his Life of John Home, a work that contains a delightful account of the literary and philosophical societies of Edinburgh, assigns another reason for concealing from Mr. Hume the secret of the Edinburgh Review; and relates an anecdote, from which it would appear, that a short time before the work was discontinued the mystery was unveiled to him. "I have heard," says the author of the "Man of Feeling," "that the conductors of the Edinburgh Review were afraid both of Mr. Hume's good-nature and his extreme artlessness; that from the one, their criticisms would have been weakened or suppressed, and from the other the secret discovered. The contents of the work strongly attracted his attention; and he expressed his surprise to some of the gentlemen concerned in it, with whom he was daily in the habit of meeting, at the excellence of a performance, written, as he presumed from his ignorance of the subject, by some persons out of their own literary circle. It was agreed to communicate the secret to him at a dinner, which was shortly after given by one of the number. At that dinner, he repeated his wonder on the subject of the Edinburgh Review. One of the company said he knew the authors, and would tell them to Mr. Hume, on his giving an oath of secrecy. 'How is the oath to be taken,'

Notwithstanding this precaution, and the care of Mr. Jardine, the Review was hurried to a premature extinction by the sensitiveness of the Scotch on the subject of religion. It is to be lamented, that an extreme degree of nervousness, amongst theologians and religious bodies, respecting their favourite tenets, should so frequently hinder the fearless investigation of truth.

The Preface to a new edition of the "Edinburgh Review," with explanatory notes, published in 1818, fully states the causes of its discontinuance. The following extract from this publication is of sufficient interest, as giving a sketch of religious parties in Scotland at the middle of last century, to justify its insertion here. "At the very moment when Mr. Wedderburn, afterwards Earl of Roslyn (in his note at the end of the second number), had announced an intention to enlarge the plan, he and his colleagues were obliged to relinquish the work. The temper of the people of Scotland was, at that moment, peculiarly jealous on every question that approached the boundaries of theology. A popular election of the parochial clergy had been restored with the Presbytery by the Revolution. The rights of patrons had been reimposed on the Scottish Church in the last years of Queen Anne, by Ministers who desired, if they did not meditate, the re-establishment of Episcopacy. But, for thirty years afterwards, this unpopular right was either disused by the patrons, or successfully resisted by the people. The zealous Presbyterians still retained the doctrine and spirit of the Covenanters; and their favourite preachers, bred up amidst the furious persecutions of Charles the Second, had rather learned piety and fortitude, than acquired that useful and ornamental learning which becomes their order in times of quiet. Some of them had separated from the Church on account of '*lay patronage*,' among other marks of degeneracy. But, besides these 'Seceders,' the majority of the Established clergy were adverse to the law of patronage, and disposed to connive at resistance to its execution. On the other hand, the more lettered and refined ministers of the Church, who had secretly relinquished many parts of the Calvinistic system—from the unpopularity of their own opinions and modes of preaching — from their connection with the gentry who held the rights of patronage — and from repugnance to the vulgar and illiterate ministers whom turbulent elections brought into the Church, — became hostile to the interference of the people, and zealously laboured to enforce the execution of a law which had hitherto remained almost dormant. The orthodox party main-

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said David, with his usual pleasantry, 'of a man accused of so much scepticism as I am? you would not trust my *Bible* oath; but I will swear by the το καλον and the το πρεπον never to reveal your secret.' He was then told the names of the authors, and the plan of the work; but it was not continued long enough to allow of his contributing any articles." — *Mackenzie's Life of Mr. John Home*, p. 25.

tained the rights of the people against a regulation imposed on them by their enemies; and the party which in matters of religion claimed the distinction of liberality and toleration, contended for the absolute authority of the civil magistrate, to the destruction of a right, which more than any other interested the conscience of the people of Scotland. At the head of this last party was Dr. Robertson, one of the contributors to the present volume, who, about the time of its appearance, was on the eve of effecting a revolution in the practice of the Church, by at length compelling the stubborn Presbyterians to submit to the authority of a law which they abhorred.

"Another circumstance rendered the time very perilous for Scotch reviewers of ecclesiastical publications. The writings of Mr. Hume, the intimate friend of the leader of the tolerant clergy, very naturally excited the alarm of the orthodox party, who, like their predecessors of the preceding age, were zealous for the rights of the people, but confined their charity within the pale of their own communion, and were much disposed to regard the impunity of heretics and infidels as a reproach to a Christian magistrate. In the year 1754, a complaint to the General Assembly against the philosophical writings of Mr. Hume and Lord Kames, was with difficulty eluded by the friends of free discussion. The writers of the Review were aware of the danger to which they were exposed by these circumstances. They kept the secret of their Review from Mr. Hume, the most intimate friend of some of them. They forbore to notice his 'History of the Stewarts,' of which the first volume appeared at Edinburgh two months before the publication of the Review; hough it is little to say that it was the most remarkable work which ever issued from the Scottish press.

"They trusted that the moderation and well-known piety of Mr. Jardine would conduct them safely through the suspicion and jealousy of jarring parties. Nor does it, in fact, appear that any part of his criticisms is at variance with that enlightened reverence for religion which he was known to feel; but he was influenced by the ecclesiastical party to which he adhered. He seems to have thought that he might securely assail the opponents of patronage through the sides of Erskine, Boston, and other popular preachers, who were either Seceders, or divines of the same school. He even ventured to use the weapon of ridicule against their extravagant metaphors, their wire-drawn allegories, their mean allusions; and to laugh at those who complained of 'the connivance at Popery, the toleration of Prelacy, the pretended rights of lay patrons of heretical professors in the Universities, and a lax clergy in possession of the Churches,' as the crying evils of the time.

"This species of attack, at a moment when the religious feelings of the public were thus susceptible, appears to have excited general alarm. The orthodox might blame the writings criticised, without approving the tone assumed by the critic. The multitude were

exasperated by the scorn with which their favourite writers were treated; and many who altogether disapproved these writings might consider ridicule as a weapon of doubtful propriety against language habitually employed to convey the religious and moral feelings of a nation. In these circumstances, the authors of the Review did not think themselves bound to hazard their quiet, reputation, and interest, by persevering in their attempt to improve the taste of their countrymen."

It is to be regretted, that a work supported by such men as Adam Smith, Dr. Robertson, and Dr. Blair, and containing indications of their genius, which though feeble are not to be mistaken, should have been discontinued for the reasons assigned in this quotation. That its continuance would have been favourable to the progress of literature, science, and liberal opinions, is obvious from the tone and character of the two published numbers. They are animated by an enlightened spirit, and written with considerable vigour and elegance. The contributions of Adam Smith are characterized by extensive information and clearness of reasoning; whilst those of Robertson evince a decided taste for that department of literature, by the successful cultivation of which his name is associated with those of Hume and Gibbon. Of the critical notices furnished by Lord Roslyn and Dr. Blair, little more can be said than that they do no discredit to them, nor to the publication in which they appeared.

The same year that saw the downfall of the "Edinburgh Review," gave birth to the "Critical Journal; or, Annals of Literature." This was a London journal projected by Mr. Archibald Hamilton, a native of Scotland, and by profession a printer. Having been for some years foreman of Mr. Strahan's printing establishment, his perseverance and talents at length enabled him to commence business on his own account. Hamilton was thus brought into connection with many persons of literary eminence, amongst whom was Dr. Smollett, with whose assistance he established the "Critical Review." This journal was the unflinching advocate of the Tory and High Church party. The "Monthly Review" had previously obtained considerable influence as the organ of the Whigs and Dissenters; and it was deemed expedient, by the writers engaged in the new undertaking, to occupy different ground, and to avow their strenuous attachment to Church and State. Whatever estimate may be formed of the political doctrines of Dr. Smollett and his coadjutors, there can be no difference of opinion as to the zeal and ability with which they supported them in the "Critical Review."

Like all public writers for the periodical press, the Editors of this journal commenced their labours with fair professions of their determination to discharge their critical functions with dignity and impartiality. But, though their efforts were neither deficient in

talent nor energy, they were not free from asperity and petulance. Of the contributions of Smollett, Dr. Anderson observes: — "His critical strictures evinced sufficient taste and judgment, but too much irritability and impatience, when any of the incensed authors, whose performances he had censured, attempted to retaliate; and a degree of acrimony of style and intemperance of language, that involved him in a variety of disputes frequently more vexatious than creditable."*

Notwithstanding these defects, the work assumed a high rank in periodical criticism, and enjoyed, for many years, the patronage of a large circle of friends. It numbered among its regular contributors some of the master minds of the age. Johnson was the author of several able articles; and several were furnished by Whitaker, the historian of Manchester. One of the most efficient and active writers was the Rev. Joseph Robertson, the author of a great variety of publications. This gentleman was a contributor to the "Critical Review" for twenty-one years; and, during that long period, furnished for it above 2,620 articles on theological, classical, poetical, and miscellaneous subjects!†

The first number of the "Literary Magazine, or Universal Review," appeared in May, 1756, a few months after the "Critical Review." The introductory address was from the pen of Dr. Johnson, and contained a perspicuous statement of the objects of the work. Its design was to combine with the variety of a Magazine the advantages of a Review. In reference to the critical department of the work, the writer of the preface remarks, "The literary history necessarily contains an account of the labours of the learned, in which whether we shall show much judgment or sagacity, must be left to our readers to determine; we can promise only justness and candour. It is not to be expected that we can insert extensive extracts, or critical examinations of all the writings which this age of authors may offer to our notice. A few only will deserve the distinction of criticism, and a few only will obtain it. We shall try to select the best and most important pieces; and are not without hope, that we may sometimes influence the public voice, and hasten the popularity of a valuable work."

Dr. Johnson contributed twenty-five reviews to this miscellany. Many of his critical notices are meagre and uninteresting; but others are written with great care and elaboration, possessing his dignity of style, with his accustomed reach of thinking, sagacity of observation, and solid instruction. Amongst the best of his critiques in the "Literary Magazine" may be enumerated the following: — on "Warton's Essays on the Genius and Writings of Pope;"

* Dr. Anderson's Life of Smollett, p. 53.

† See a Sketch of his Life in Nichols's "Literary Anecdotes," vol. iii. p. 504. In the same work there is a Memoir of Mr. Archibald Hamilton, the individual who established the "Critical Review." (vol. iii. p. 398.)

—"Blackwell's Memoirs of the Court of Augustus;" —"Four Letters from Sir Isaac Newton to Dr. Bentley, containing some Arguments in Proof of a Deity;" —"The General History of Polybius, translated from the Greek;" —"Brown's Christian Morals;" —and "Jenyns's Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil." Dr. Drake, in his Life of Dr. Johnson, characterizes the review of Jenyns's book as a "masterly disquisition, on a subject of great metaphysical obscurity, and a complete refutation and exposure of the weak and arrogant parts of that singular production."

In addition to these contributions, Johnson wrote, for the same journal, several biographical, moral, historical, and political essays. The other writers seem to have been tolerably well qualified for the parts allotted to them; and they succeeded in supplying the public with a pleasing miscellany, in which the lively and the grave were judiciously blended; and elegant literature gracefully interwoven with dissertations on morals, politics, and metaphysics.

In 1773, another attempt was made in Edinburgh to improve the character of Scotch periodical literature, by establishing a work that should perform the double office of a Magazine and a Critical Journal. This publication appeared under the title of the "Edinburgh Magazine and Review." The celebrated Gilbert Stuart, LL.D., and Mr. William Smellie, author of the "Philosophy of Natural History," had the merit of originating, and conducting it for three years with a large share of talent and popularity. Reviews of books did not form the most important part of the editors' labours. Their object was to attract the public by the variety and novelty of their matter. They observe in their preface, that, "to be generally useful and entertaining, they mean to suit themselves to readers of every denomination. It is not solely their intention to paint the manners and the fashions of the times; to interest the passions, and wander in the regions of fancy: they propose to blend instruction with amusement; to pass from light and gay effusions to severe disquisition; to mingle erudition with wit, and to contrast the wisdom with the folly of men. They wish equally to allure and to please the studious and the grave, the dissipated and the idle. To the former they may suggest matter for reflection and remark; into the latter they may infuse the love of knowledge; and to both they may afford a not inelegant relaxation and amusement."

The contents of the work furnish abundant proofs that these promises were fully performed. The execution of every department is superior to that of the general run of previous periodical publications. Many of the articles comprise much useful information, and are not deficient in the graces of composition. The conductors were men of ability and learning; attached to liberal principles and free institutions. The critical department was under the special management of Dr. Stuart and Mr. Smellie. Unfortunately, however, many of Dr. Stuart's articles are chargeable with unjust severity, and are not unfrequently disfigured by gross pre-

judices and personalities. The dissatisfaction that was thus occasioned, contributed to the failure of the undertaking.

There can be no doubt, however, that in this case, as in that of the "Edinburgh Review," acerbity of feeling, produced by religious animosities, had a powerful influence in diminishing the popularity of the work and bringing it to a sudden close. During the period of its existence, from 1773 till 1776, there was an unusual degree of excitement in Edinburgh arising out of theological controversy; and some essays that appeared in the Magazine were regarded as unfavourable to Orthodox belief, and subversive of Evangelical religion. Such an imputation, whether well founded or not, formed an impassable barrier to the further progress of the journal. Whatever grounds there may have been for the charge, it is certain that the conductors, in their endeavours to cherish a spirit of toleration, and to steer a middle course in the prevalent polemical disputations, raised a suspicion in the public mind that they were either indifferent to the advancement of religion, or sceptical as to its truths. There is a paragraph, in the preface to their fourth volume, that may be quoted in support of this opinion. In allusion to a report industriously circulated of their leaning to infidelity, they state, "they have been attacked by bigots for their moderation and charity, and have been fancied to be sceptical, because they have not favoured absurd prejudices, and defended opinions, wild and fantastic, disgraceful to Christianity, and unworthy of men." The Review did not, as may be readily supposed, long survive these attacks; and the injudicious manner in which Dr. Stuart reviewed Monboddo's work, on the "Origin and Progress of Language," hastened its extinction. After the publication of five volumes, the proprietors, in August, 1776, announced its discontinuance, without any explanation of the cause; but promised that it should be resumed in an improved form.*

* In the Memoirs of Wm. Smellie, of Edinburgh, there is a minute account of the origin, progress, and extinction of this Journal.

It would exceed the limits of this Essay, and be irrelevant to its purpose, to enter into a lengthened history of those periodical journals published in Edinburgh, previously to 1802, which do not come under the denomination of Reviews. The subjoined enumeration of the most popular, will show the general estimation in which periodical literature has always been held by the inhabitants of Scotland. The "Old Scots Magazine" occupies the first place in the list, as the venerable parent from which all the rest sprang, and claims our respect for the attainments of the persons who, at different intervals, were concerned in its management. No similar Scotch work contains so great a variety of miscellaneous, statistical, and local information. It began in January, 1739, and was the first Magazine in Scotland of the slightest pretensions to talent and importance. For a few years it was occasionally supplied with contributions by several eminent individuals. Dr. Murray, Professor of Oriental Languages in the University, and Dr. Leyden were latterly connected with the editorial department. The circulation was then extensive; and this entertaining Miscellany was generally esteemed for its articles on subjects of agricultural and local interest. As the progress of information increased, Journals of a superior class made their appearance, which completely eclipsed the old Magazine.

The Rev. Paul Henry Maty, son of Dr. Maty, the editor of the "Journal Britannique," of which a notice has been already given, began, in 1782, the "New Review," consisting principally of notices of foreign publications. For four years it enjoyed a considerable share of public patronage. It was discontinued, in 1786, in consequence of the ill health of Mr. Maty, who does not appear to have had any one connected with him in its management. Of his learning and critical abilities, his biographer speaks favourably; but his journal does not rank higher than most of its contemporaries.

The next publication that followed, of which there are any numbers extant, was the "British Magazine," printed by Lumsden and Robertson, in 1746, and edited by Dr. M'Tait. It did not survive more than two years. In July, 1757, the "Edinburgh Magazine" was commenced by Walter Ruddiman. It continued until 1762, at which period six volumes had been published, when it was given up. The son of Thomas Ruddiman, the celebrated grammarian, revived this work, under the name of the "Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement," which he edited for many years. It is probable that the speculation turned out a profitable one, as the publication reached its fifty-ninth volume in March, 1784. A weekly journal was attempted in 1782, entitled the "North British Magazine, or Caledonian Miscellany of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment," which continued only a year. In January, 1785, a more successful experiment was tried by James Sibbald, who printed and edited the "Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany." Under the management of this gentleman, it prospered, until 1792, when it was relinquished. At the commencement of the ensuing year, a new series of the same work was commenced by Dr. James Anderson, who conducted it with success, until 1803, when it was incorporated with the "Old Scots Magazine."

The "Mirror" and "Lounger" were of a character somewhat different from the periodicals enumerated in the foregoing remarks; being on the same plan as our Classical Essayists, and written in the manner of the "Tatler" and "Spectator." The "Mirror" commenced in January, 1779; and was continued every Tuesday and Saturday to 27th May, 1780. The "Lounger," which may be considered as a continuation of the "Mirror," was conducted by the same individuals; it appeared in 1785, and terminated on the 6th January, 1787.

In about three years after the "Lounger" had been relinquished, Dr. James Anderson established the "Bee," a weekly paper consisting of light essays on miscellaneous subjects, occasionally blended with dissertations of a philosophical and political character. It commenced on Wednesday, 22d December, 1790, and was regularly continued until eighteen volumes were completed, when it terminated for want of adequate support.

Dr. Drake, in prosecuting his enquiries on the progress of periodical journals, discovered that, at a period antecedent to the publication of the "Mirror," a work appeared in Edinburgh, on a similar plan, called the "Tatler," so far back as 1711. Of its history and character he was not able to obtain any information. Six years after Dr. Anderson discontinued the "Bee," a paper was attempted, under the name of "Felix Phantom." Each paper is dated from "Fairy Land." It lasted only a few months, from April to November, 1796. The "Ghost" having failed to attract much attention and curiosity, its sudden disappearance may be easily accounted for. Another ephemeral journal, called the "Trifle," was in existence at the same time with "Felix Phantom," and equally destitute of ability and interest. The reader will find a brief account of the periodical literature of Scotland, from 1739 to 1780, in "Gough's British Antiquities," p. 745. For further information on the history of the "Mirror" and "Lounger," see the concluding essay of the "Mirror;" the Life of Wm. Creech, prefixed to the publication of his "Fugitive Pieces;" and Drake's Essays on the "Rambler," "Adventurer," "and Tatler," vol. ii. pp. 366. 374.

The "English Review" commenced about a year after the last-mentioned publication. The article on "Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," in which the sceptical tendency of that great work is so keenly exposed, was contributed by Mr. Whitaker, and served to increase the reputation of the Review. There was nothing, however, in its plan or arrangement, differing, in any essential points, from other journals. It contains various specimens of sound and impartial criticism; but its contributions are not generally of a superior order. It was relinquished in 1798, after thirty volumes had been published.

Mr. Thomas Christie, the author of several works on a diversity of topics, established the "Analytical Review," in 1788. It was conducted for some years with a good deal of spirit and ability. A few articles in this journal might be referred to for the information, talent, and acumen which they display; but the great mass of its contributions are not distinguished by any thing attractive or profound. It amounts to twenty-two volumes.

The "British Critic, or Theological Review," commenced in 1793. The editorship was entrusted to Archdeacon Nares. His criticisms have been warmly commended for their erudition, judgment, and sagacity. Some of the brightest ornaments of the Established Church were associated with him in his labours; but his most efficient and popular coadjutor was Mr. Beloe, translator of Herodotus. The primary object of this journal is to uphold the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England. Its circulation, therefore, is principally confined to the divines and members of that party. Many of its articles are of a controversial character, and exhibit the peculiar spirit which religious controversy invariably generates. Notwithstanding this defect, it has been ably and skilfully conducted. Its best articles testify the research and zeal of their writers. If their efforts have not been always distinguished by enlarged views on disputed and mysterious points of faith, concerning which it is absurd to suppose that mankind will ever agree in opinion, they deserve praise for their exertions in the cause of Christianity against the insidious designs of false friends, and the open, though impotent, assaults of its adversaries.

It was no part of the object of this discourse, to include in it all the Reviews which appeared previously to 1802. Of those most esteemed for their ability, and the literary fame of their conductors, notices have been given that may enable the reader to judge of the state of periodical criticism before the appearance of the Edinburgh Review. The works which have been mentioned may be considered as the most favourable specimens. That they were occasionally enriched by the contributions of men who occupied an elevated rank in the world of letters, has been proved by a reference to many well-known names. But, if their value be estimated by that of the general mass of their contents, it would be untrue to affirm that they possess much merit. To be convinced

of their inferiority as critical journals, it is only necessary to glance at the meagre and superficial notices with which they are filled. Their pretensions, in this respect, are frequently below mediocrity. A critique of moderate length, written with ability, and in a pleasing style, sometimes enlivens the mass of dulness by which it is surrounded; but, in general, the articles are little more than advertisements of new works, from which a few extracts are taken, and put together without a single remark illustrative of the manner in which the author has acquitted himself of his task. To the reader, therefore, this species of criticism imparted no other benefit than that which was derived from a dry catalogue of books, and an insipid abstract of their contents. The reviewers for the most part applauded and condemned without condescending to assign a reason for their decisions. They did not profess to be guided by general principles. The excellencies or defects of an author were despatched in a sentence, or left to be ascertained by a series of quotations selected from his works without skill or discrimination. A philosophical exposition of the topics treated of was seldom attempted. What the writers omitted the reviewers did not supply. There was nothing in their vague observations which evinced originality or vigour; and they were equally destitute of the attractions of taste and eloquence.

The following remark was made by Gibbon, after reading the ninth chapter of Longinus on the Sublime: — "I was acquainted only with two ways of criticising a beautiful passage: the one to show, by an exact anatomy of it, its distinct beauties, and whence they spring; the other an idle exclamation, a general panegyric, which leaves nothing behind it. Longinus has shown me a third. He tells me his own feelings upon reading it; and tells them with such energy that he communicates them." That this is a delightful and beneficial employment of the critical art, every one must have felt who is familiar (and who is not?) with the masterly disquisitions in our modern reviews. But the English journals of the last century were deficient in this fertile source of intellectual gratification and improvement. They did not aspire to enlighten the understanding, or to guide the public taste. If they recommended any literary performance, it was seldom for any other purpose than to promote its sale. Its importance or tendency was a matter of subordinate consideration. The critic would have deemed it a violation of the dignity of his office to compose a dissertation on the subject to which it referred, and to instruct his readers in the principles and reasonings upon which the enquiry should have been conducted. In consequence of this mechanical method of reviewing, critical journals were of use only to book-collectors.

In their political department there was also a grievous lack of depth and information. Furious philippics against Tories or Whigs, or lampoons designed to ridicule some conspicuous public character, were not uncommon. But no luminous views were given

of any great political question. The science of Government was not expounded in an enlarged and philosophical spirit. The principles which should regulate the people and their rulers in their respective situations were not developed; and many problems of vital import to the liberties and happiness of mankind were passed over without the slightest notice. It was not to be expected that national sentiment should take its tone from such works, or that they should exercise any considerable influence over the conduct of statesmen, and the opinions of the community.

The inefficiency of the old English Reviews, considered in their critical capacity, resulted principally from their connection with the publishing booksellers. Though the majority were established with upright intentions, by writers who professed to value intellectual freedom, yet, from causes too obvious to require explanation, they gradually yielded to the dominion of the trade, and became mere puffing-machines for the books brought forth under the auspices of the leading publishers. Periodical criticism, thus fettered and degraded, had no salutary action on the popular mind. It wanted the energy and spirit inseparable from integrity of purpose. Its characteristics were tameness, coldness, and servility; though many exceptions may be found in particular articles.

The effects of trammelling criticism, by reducing it to the level of a mercantile system, are forcibly described in the following extract from an essay, in the "Edinburgh Annual Register for 1809," attributed to Sir Walter Scott. "A spirit of indolence is usually accompanied with a disposition to mercy; or, rather, those whom it has thoroughly possessed cannot give themselves the trouble of rousing to deeds of severity. Accordingly the calm, even, and indifferent style of criticism, occasioned by the causes already stated, was distinguished by a lenient aspect towards its object. The reviewer, in the habit of treating with complacency those works which belonged to his own publisher, was apt to use the same general style of civility towards others, although they had not the same powerful title to protection. A certain deference was visibly paid to an author of celebrity, whether founded on his literary qualities, or on the adventitious distinctions of rank and title; and generally there was a marked and guarded *retenue* both in the strictures hazarded, and in the mode of expressing them. If raillery was ever attempted, there was no horseplay in it; and the only fault which could be objected to by the reader was, that the critic was 'content to dwell in decencies for ever.'

"This rule was not, indeed, without exceptions. The mind of a liberal and public-spirited critic sometimes reversed the sentence of his employer; and, unlike the prophet of Midian, anathematised the works on which he was summoned to bestow benedictions. Neither was it proper that the critical rod should be hung up in mere show, lest, in time, as it is learnedly argued by the Duke of Vienna, it should become more mocked than feared. The terrors

of the office were, therefore, in some measure maintained by the severity exercised upon the trumpery novels and still-born poetry which filled the monthly catalogue, whose unknown, and perhaps starving authors, fared like the parish boys at a charity school, who are flogged not only for their own errors, but to vindicate the authority of the master, who cares not to use the same freedom with the children of the squire. Sometimes, also, 'fate demanded a nobler head.' The work of a rival bookseller was to be crushed even in birth; a powerful literary patron, or, perhaps, the reviewer himself, had some private pique to indulge; and added a handful of slugs to the powder and paper which formed the usual contents of his blunderbuss. Sometimes political discussions were introduced, before which deference and moderation are uniformly found to disappear. Or, in fine, the sage bibliopolist himself occasionally opined that a little severity might favour the sale of his review; and was therefore pleased to 'cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war.' But the operation of each and all of these causes was insufficient to counteract the tendency of this species of criticism to stagnate in a course of dull, and flat, and lukewarm courtesy. Something of the habitual civility, and professional deference of the tradesman, seemed to qualify the labours of those who wrote under his direction; and the critics themselves, accessible (not, we believe, to pecuniary interposition,) but to applications for favours in divers modes, which they found it difficult to resist, and mixing, too, in the intercourse of private life with many of those who afforded the subjects of their criticism, were seldom disposed to exercise their office in its full, or even its necessary rigour. These were days of halcyon quietness for authors; especially for that numerous class, who, contented to venture their whole literary credit on one dull work, written upon as dull a subject, look forward less to rapid sale, and popular applause, than to a favourable criticism from the reviewers, and a word or two of snug, quiet, honied assent from a few private friends. The public, indeed, began to murmur that

> 'Lost was the critic's sense, nor could be found,
> While one dull formal unison went round.'

But the venerable and well-wigged authors of sermons and essays, and mawkish poems, and stupid parish histories, bore each triumphantly his ponderous load into the mart of literature, expanded it upon the stall of his bookseller, sat brooding over it till evening closed, and then retired with the consolation, that, if his wares had not met a purchaser, they had at least been declared saleable, and received the stamp of currency from the official inspectors of literary merchandize. From these soothing dreams, authors, booksellers, and critics were soon to be roused by a rattling peal of thunder; and it now remains to be shown how a conspiracy of beardless boys innovated upon the memorable laws of the old republic of literature, scourged the booksellers out of her senate-house, overset the totter-

ing thrones of the idols whom they had set up, awakened the hundred-necked snake of criticism, and curdled the whole ocean of milk and water, in which, like the serpentine supporter of Vistnou, he had wreathed and wallowed in unwieldy sloth for a quarter of a century. Then, too, amid this dire combustion, like true revolutionists, they erected themselves into a committee of public safety, whose decrees were written in blood, and executed without mercy."

The sketch now given of the rise and progress of Reviews, from their introduction into France by Denis de Sallo, to the period when, in 1802, the Edinburgh Review came forth to astonish the literary world, is not presented to the reader in the vain presumption that it is free from error in the details, and sufficiently full to do justice to a subject which would require ample materials and great labour for its complete investigation: perhaps, however, enough has been done to point out the most prominent defects of the critical journals published in Great Britain previously to the French Revolution.

Whatever defects may be discovered in this extraordinary work, no one can question, that it effected a complete revolution in critical discussion, gave a tone to the journals of a similar kind to which it gave birth, and accelerated the triumph of liberal principles in every department of political science. But before entering into an examination of its literary and political merits, it may be useful to offer a few remarks on the particulars in which it differed from the Reviews noticed in the preceding sketch, and on the peculiar circumstances growing out of the altered state of society which contributed to its influence and success.

From what has been said with regard to the character of the critical journals in England, at the close of the eighteenth century, it is obvious that no attempt to rescue that branch of periodical literature from the degradation into which it had fallen could have succeeded, had not men of more than ordinary ability engaged in the undertaking, and resolved to pursue a more independent course than their predecessors. To give effect to their labours, it was necessary that their work should be modelled on a plan different from other publications; that it should display greater talent; and that its principles should be congenial with the liberal spirit which began to prevail in society. The first object of the Edinburgh Reviewers, therefore, was to supply their readers with specimens of impartial criticism, the result of a searching examination and comparison of the best productions that appeared. To accomplish this object, in which their predecessors had, in most instances, failed, it was indispensable that the Review should be unshackled by any connection with publishers. The subserviency of critics to their employers had brought the profession into disrepute. The interests of literature and the efforts of genius were too often sacrificed to the selfishness of booksellers. It was not uncommon to puff an author

for a bribe, or to abuse him for the gratification of revenge. If any sinister design could be promoted by ministering to the vanity of a patron, or blasting the prospects of a rival in business, obsequious reviewers were to be had willing to sell their principles to the highest bidder, provided the wages of literary prostitution were sufficiently liberal to tempt their cupidity. The evils occasioned by this corruption of an exalted office, induced the conductors of the Edinburgh Review to keep themselves aloof from such mercenary trammels. They have been accused of yielding to political biasses in their opinions of particular works; but it could never be urged against them, with any shadow of truth, that the gentlemen of Paternoster Row exercised an improper sway over their decisions. This circumstance gave a character of independence to their writings which greatly contributed to their éclat, and influence over the public mind. The opinions of the Edinburgh Reviewers, upon every topic, were received with deference. They were at first, indeed, regarded as oracles; their authority was universally acknowledged; and few of those who suffered from their excesses had the courage to make any resistance. The editor assumed a fearless and lofty tone, which commanded respect, though it sometimes mortified by its severity.

The restricting of criticisms to works of unequivocal merit, or to subjects which possessed a strong claim on the public attention, tended to raise the character of the Edinburgh Review. In the original address, the editors announced, that "it would form no part of their object, to take notice of every production that issues from the press; and that they wished their journal to be distinguished, rather for the selection, than for the number of its articles." They were influenced in this determination by the fact, that a very large proportion of the books published never attracted any share of public attention; and, consequently, it was not to be expected, that a critical notice of them would have any other effect than that of "gratifying the partiality of friends, or the malignity of enemies." From the adoption of this plan, it was impossible that the Review could exhibit a complete view of modern literature; but it enabled the editor to regulate his choice of works and subjects by the interest they excited.

That many advantages were produced by this arrangement cannot be doubted. The old Reviews were generally brought out monthly, and some of them more frequently. It has been shown that, with the exception of occasional articles by the editor, or some contributor distinguished by superior attainments from the rest of his associates, their critical articles were insignificant and uninteresting. The object was to huddle together, in a confused heap, a series of unconnected notices of all the books that had appeared since last publication. From such a system nothing useful or instructive could be expected. No time was given for deliberation; and, as a necessary consequence, the judgments of the critic were often rash and unjust; and, from the want of time or capacity, he

sentenced an author to condemnation, or held him up to applause, without any statement of the grounds upon which the award had been given.

The best way to avoid these defects was to publish the Review quarterly. This afforded abundant leisure for reflection and preparation, and enabled the contributors to display a judicious selection of articles, carefully written, evincing studious research, and comprising a discussion of those topics in which the public took most interest. The extensive circulation of the weekly journals shows that they are recommended by peculiar advantages, which make them be perused with avidity by a numerous class of readers. It may be fairly questioned, however, whether, as organs of criticism, they are not comparatively inefficient, or rather decidedly unfavourable to a satisfactory estimation of an author's claims. The only advantage they seem to possess, is in awakening the curiosity of the public as to new works, by giving an early notice of their contents, with illustrative passages. In this there is often, however, the grossest deception. The real character of a literary production can never be ascertained by a few quotations; and it is of every day occurrence, that books, extravagantly lauded in our daily and weekly chronicles, and of which favourable specimens are ostentatiously paraded in their columns, are utterly destitute of any solid merit.

The system of criticism adopted in these ephemeral publications is injurious both to the reader and the reviewer. The former is released from the exertion of thought and the labour of investigation. He relies upon the crude opinions of the critic, or perhaps forms an erroneous judgment of the book from an imperfect analysis of its contents. The latter, from the nature of his office, is compelled, in most instances, to write without reflection, and to review without reading. From the influence of habit, he may sometimes catch the spirit of a work from a hasty glance over its pages; but, in general, he fails in fairly appreciating its character. He dogmatizes when he is without materials to reason; captivates with the glitter of words when he wants the substance of argument; and strives to please when he cannot inform. There is nothing of the philosophy and spirit of true criticism in these puerile attempts to assort shreds and patches. They are alike deficient in aim and method. The critical speculations of such writers afford no means by which to appreciate genius; they derive no support from fundamental principles; and evince no range of enquiry, or comprehensiveness of thought. These are the unavoidable results of endeavouring to write something clever and smart on every work that appears, instead of selecting a few only, and deliberately examining their merits.

The "Monthly Review" blended critical strictures on the subjects of books, with a copious abstract of their contents. But the writers crowded into each number too many notices, many of them trivial and of no value. The Edinburgh critics have

been censured for running into the opposite extreme, and substituting profound or learned disquisitions in the place of discriminating reviews. They frequently, indeed, have selected the title of a work as a pretext for giving a disquisition on the topic to which it refers; the work being dismissed without a single remark of praise or censure. The value of their labours must not, therefore, be estimated by the information they afford as to the works they profess to review. On the contrary, their principal merit consists in the additions they have made to the stock of general knowledge; in the materials for thinking, they have diffused among the people; the importance and originality of their speculations; and the stimulus they have given to the mental faculties of their readers.

This plan of substituting essays for critiques is attended with some disadvantages; but it cannot be questioned, that, in a general point of view, it has been productive of much good. It enables the critic fully to display his talent and the extent of his powers. The reader obtains access to mines of useful knowledge, which it might require a great deal of labour to reach in any other way. He is tempted to think upon subjects of vital importance, and stimulated to search for further knowledge by which he may be qualified to discuss them in their minutest details, and in various points of view. Besides, it is necessary to excite curiosity, before a vivid and lasting impression can be made upon the national mind. For this reason, says an acute writer, "there cannot be too much dialectics and debateable matter, too much pomp and paradox, in a Reviewer. To elevate and surprise is the great rule for producing a dramatic and electrical effect. The more you startle the reader, the more he will be able to startle others with a succession of smart intellectual shocks. The most admired of our modern Reviews is saturated with this sort of electrical matter, which is regularly played off so as to produce a good deal of astonishment, and a strong sensation in the public mind. The intrinsic merits of an author are a question of very subordinate consideration to the keeping up of the character of the work, and supplying the town with a sufficient number of grave or brilliant topics for the consumption of the next three months." *

There is a large portion of truth in these observations; and there is no doubt, that the Edinburgh Review is mainly indebted for its fame to its original dissertations on questions of grave import to the community.

The generalizing style of criticism, which the Edinburgh Review had the merit of bringing to perfection and rendering popular, was adopted to a greater extent in the political, than in any other description of articles; nor is there any department of the work in which more information and talent is displayed. It has, indeed, been objected to its disquisitions on politics, that the writers felt bound to advocate, sometimes in a narrow and sectarian spirit, the prin-

* Hazlitt's "Table Talk," vol. ii. p. 119.

ciples which characterize the party to which they are attached. The prevalence of this spirit, it is said, will account for the distortion of facts, the inflammatory appeals to popular prejudices, and the fierce attacks upon the motives of public men, which have sullied the pages of the Review. It has biassed, it is said, the critic's opinions upon subjects wholly distinct from politics, in which an author's attachment to a different party has drawn down an attack upon his literary productions; and he has been subjected to the Reviewer's wrath, because he happened to differ from him on some question, as to which the feelings of the multitude were powerfully excited. "On the modern system of reviewing," says a writer already quoted, "these prejudices are like the plague in Leviticus, which not only infected warp and woof, linen and woollen, but left its foul stains upon the walls, the mortar, and the stones, upon subjects whose natures seemed incapable either of admitting or retaining the tokens of pestilential infection."

But these objections, like others that have been brought against the literary and scientific essays of the Edinburgh Review, have been urged in a spirit of exaggeration. Admitting their validity, it may be easily shown, that the political contributions to the work have operated powerfully to strengthen the attachment of the public to liberal principles and free institutions. Besides, it is not to be questioned, that the party spirit which pervades our leading periodical journals is neutralized by its tempting the reader to peruse the arguments on both sides of every momentous question. The prejudice he imbibes from one is dispelled or weakened by another. It is impossible that erroneous opinions as to government, or measures of national improvement, or the acts of public functionaries, should long prevail, where there is access to different political journals. They occasionally, no doubt, disseminate unsound and dangerous opinions; but these are sure to be fully exposed; so that even their errors contribute to encourage a spirit of free enquiry; to make men read and meditate upon the topics investigated in their pages; and to give them a strong desire and the requisite facilities for the acquisition of useful knowledge. There are few persons in the middle or lower ranks of life whose opportunities enable them to collect, from a series of original works, the materials necessary for a comprehensive examination of every important question of national policy, and difficult problem in political science, in which their own interest, and that of the great mass of their fellow-creatures, may be deeply involved. They are, probably, ignorant of the books that should be consulted; and though they knew where to apply for information, they may have no leisure to undergo the toil without which it cannot be obtained. Is it not of inconceivable importance to the well-being of society, and to the spread of sound opinions, that our Reviews are supplied with dissertations on every subject most interesting to the reading portion of the community? — that in them is concentrated the essence

of many a learned treatise, too voluminous to be generally read, and too dull to be attractive?—and that the ablest writers make them vehicles for enlightening mankind?

Our periodical publications would have had a more direct influence on the conduct and sentiments of the majority of the people had it not been for their price, which is greatly increased by oppressive taxes. The labouring classes are not, it is true, so enlightened as they should be in a nation that boasts of its civilization; but such of them as have studied the elementary principles of political science, have evinced no less acuteness, than their superiors, in comprehending abstract truths. If the imperfect instruction they have received, and that little obtained by their own unassisted exertions, in the midst of toils and privations, should lead them into error, with respect to the principles of government, and the working of political institutions, why need we affect surprise? The poor are precisely what they have been made, by those who should have supplied them with better means of acquiring sound information. Those who have strained every nerve to impede the progress of intellectual improvement, in order that tyranny and misrule might continue undetected and unpunished, have much with which to reproach themselves. But the Edinburgh Reviewers own no fellowship with such persons. On the contrary, they have done more than all the other journalists in the country put together, to furnish all classes with solid instruction on every topic of public interest. They have neither flattered popular prejudices, nor quailed before the frowns of the great; they have sought less to please than to instruct. Principles and truths of the utmost consequence to all, have been unfolded in their pages with singular talent, and with a disinterestedness and success that will ensure the enduring applauses of the wise and good.

The tone of dictation and severity assumed by the Reviewers in their critical notices, increased the celebrity of their efforts, though it may have had, in a few instances, a blighting influence on genius. A caustic attack upon some distinguished poet or philosopher, to whom a numerous circle of admirers gave their undissembled homage, made the Review be talked about, quoted in the newspapers, and read by thousands, indifferent, perhaps, to the poetical and political doctrines of which it was the advocate.

In general, it may be safely affirmed, that excessive severity in criticism has a tendency to repress the efforts of the timid, and to abate the perseverance by which excellence is attained. It is only occasionally that authors are to be met with who "neither deserve the lash nor the spur; whose genius is of that vigorous and healthful constitution, as to allow the free and ordinary course of criticism to be administered, without fear that their rickety bantlings may be crushed in the correction." There is a delicacy inseparable from minds of a sensitive cast that recoils from rude assaults. To govern by terror, whether in literature or politics, is never safe

or judicious. The sway of the despot fails to ensure a willing obedience; nor is his power always an adequate protection against the resentment of those whom he galls by his tyranny. That there are cases in which Reviewers should apply the lash unmoved by the cries and reproaches of the sufferer, no one will dispute. When insolence is to be rebuked, imposture detected, and dishonesty exposed, no personal considerations, or feelings of misplaced sympathy, should deter the critic from discharging his duty with unmitigated severity. But, in general, it will be found, that a gentle mode of treatment produces the most useful results. An author, whose pride and obstinacy would revolt with disdain from a tyrannical exercise of critical authority, might yield to respectful remonstrance, if conveyed in the accents of kindness and courtesy. Nor should the adoption of a lenient mode of inflicting literary chastisement be deemed a compromise of the Reviewer's integrity. There is a reverence due to genius, even when its light and glory are obscured by passing clouds. He who would recall it from its wanderings, and train it to excellence, must not press too severely on its irregularities, lest it perish under the treatment designed to prolong its existence.*

* Miss Edgeworth has been adduced as a remarkable instance of a writer whom the most liberal praise has not improperly elevated, nor the bitterest censure depressed. It is true, as her eloquent critic has observed, "that the overweening politeness which might be thought due to her sex, is forgotten in the contemplation of her *manly* understanding, and a long series of writings, all directed to some great and permanent improvement of society." Besides, that highly gifted lady should not be classed with the general mass of individuals who have made literature a profession. Her mind is not of a common order; and what would chill the energies of weaker intellects, might only stimulate her meritorious exertions to instruct and amuse mankind. The few blemishes which the keen eye of the critic has discovered in the admirable works of Miss Edgeworth, have been visited with very slight reprehension. Reviewers of every rank and character have delighted to do honour to her genius. There is only one other author of our times whose writings have been remembered with so large a portion of approbation. Sir Walter Scott has never manifested impatience or petulance at the attacks of the press; but it should be recollected, that he possesses the courage which is as necessary as talent to secure literary fame. Though he has proved himself superior to censure, it ought not to be forgotten, that he has had little to complain of from his critical judges, compared with other eminent literary characters; as, for example, Byron or Moore, Keats or Shelley. His productions have been ushered into the world amid the grateful applauses of thousands; and Reviewers have dealt gently with his most glaring faults. Still it is impossible not to admire the spirit in which the following remarks are composed. "I determined," says this truly great man, "that, without shutting my ears to the voice of true criticism, I would pay no regard to that which assumes the form of satire. I therefore resolved to arm myself with the triple brass of Horace, against all the roving warfare of satire, parody, and sarcasm: to laugh if the jest was a good one; or, if otherwise, to let it hum and buzz itself to sleep. It is to the observance of these rules, according to my best belief, that, after a life of thirty years engaged in literary labours of various kinds, I attribute my never having been entangled in any literary quarrel or controversy; and, which is a more pleasing result, that I have been distinguished by the personal friendship of my most approved contemporaries of all parties." — *Autobiography of Sir Walter Scott. See Preface to a new edition of his Poems, lately published by Cadell.*

Having described the nature of these changes which the Edinburgh Review introduced into the old system of criticism, it remains to show, that the intellectual and political state of the country at the period of its establishment contributed, though subordinately to more general causes, to its popularity. It was not till towards the close of last century, that the periodical literature of Great Britain began to assume the political and commanding tone by which it is at present distinguished. It rose into estimation as that fascinating species of composition declined which was introduced by Steele and Addison.

The striking revolution in national taste, which consigned the "Tatler," "Spectator," and other works of a similar character to comparative obscurity, may be traced to the change effected in society by political causes, and to the passion for more substantial and exciting information than they supplied. The periodical literature, brought to perfection by Steele and his contemporaries, was precisely adapted to the character of their age. The form of their Essays, the topics they discussed, the light and vivacious spirit by which they were animated, were better calculated, than any other description of writing, to arrest the attention and captivate the imagination of the reader. They had also a powerful influence in preparing the public for the reception of more solid compositions and loftier flights of genius. It must, however, be admitted that in the papers of Addison, more than in those of his associates, there was evidence of a nobler aim, a greater compass of mind, and a deeper penetration into the sources of taste, criticism, and morals.

Important events took place, during the reign of George the Third, which gave a new direction to popular taste, quickened into action the intellect of the whole nation, and turned it from the "green pastures and still waters" of literature into the agitated ocean of political discussion. It was then that those graphic sketches of manners, and playful satires on fashionable amusements, which once created so lively a sensation, began to be regarded with frigid indifference. The minds of the people were roused to the investigation of more momentous topics than those furnished by the habits and frivolities of the higher classes, or by the peculiarities of individual character. Publications were quickly adapted to the altered taste of the times. They treated of civil privileges, of the objects of governments, and the duties and rights of the people. They breathed the renovated spirit of a new era. Bold, eloquent, and vigorous in their style, they appealed to immutable principles and enduring interests; and, in the course of a few years, supplanted, in popular favour, the finely tempered irony and pungent wit of Steele, the grace and moral beauty of Addison, the Oriental richness of Hawkesworth, the pomp of Johnson, the vivacity of Colman, the fertile genius of Cumberland, and the pathos of Mackenzie.

To expatiate, at any length, on the productions of those masters of our language, would be foreign to the object of the present Essay. It was necessary, however, to glance at the subject, in order to account for that change in the mental tendencies of society which ensured a brilliant celebrity to such journals as the Edinburgh Review. To the works of the British Essayists, as specimens of polished composition, as faithful portraitures of manners, and glowing pictures of society, such ample justice has been done by a modern author, that none of inferior attainments and more limited information should revert to the subject.*

That those charming productions were the means of sowing the seeds of a delicate and refined taste, and diffused among the community models of graceful and polished, though feeble, composition, has never been disputed. They were exactly fitted to the intellectual attainments of the nation during the reign of Queen Anne. A desire for instruction had begun to appear among the people; but they had not arrived at that advanced stage of improvement when they could derive gratification from works of greater depth and learning. The class of publications most likely to attract the greatest number of readers, were those which required no exertion of thought, no variety of erudition, to comprehend their meaning and appreciate their beauty. It was not surprising, therefore, that a series of essays which blended amusement with information — which abounded in wit, vivacity, and humour — which excelled in lively illustration, laughable anecdote, picturesque description, and delineation of character, should have produced so instantaneous and vivid an impression; and have preserved their ascendency undiminished, until events took place in the world of politics, which turned men's thoughts to the cabals of politicians, the intrigues of cabinets, and the revolutions of empires.

Another leading characteristic in the periodical labours of Steele and Addison, is their being almost exclusively restricted to subjects of a literary, critical, or moral nature. Political questions are but seldom discussed. To ridicule eccentricity, to excite laughter at personal peculiarities, and to administer a gentle corrective to the venial errors of mankind, were the primary objects of those distinguished ornaments of English literature. But we do not resort to their works for dissertations on forms of government—for an exposition of the science of jurisprudence and the principles of political economy — for impartial strictures on the conduct of those in authority — or for a manly vindication of the rights of the people. They attempt nothing that concerns the general passions of man, or the laws by which he is governed as a member of political society.

* The reader will recognize Dr. Drake as the writer here referred to. Those who have perused his critical and biographical Essays on the "Tatler," "Spectator," "Rambler," "Idler," and "Guardian," must have admired the extensive research and critical acumen which they display. In no other work of a similar kind will be found so full and interesting an account of the rise, progress, and effects of those publications.

This abstinence from political discussion in the publications referred to, may be traced to the circumstances in which England was then placed. The people had begun to enjoy temporary repose after an arduous and protracted contest with despotic power. From the period of the civil wars, down to the Revolution of 1688, they had been engaged in a struggle for their rights against the encroachments of political and ecclesiastical tyranny. The dissensions in which they had acted so conspicuous a part, were, in some respects, injurious to national literature. They divested it of that grace, elegance, and refinement, by which it is distinguished in more peaceful times. To compensate for this loss, genius and talent sprung out of the convulsion, and a race of sturdy champions appeared to contend for the civil and religious liberties of their countrymen. Having attained their object, the stimulus was withdrawn which had previously operated upon their minds; and they turned their thoughts to the tranquil and improving pursuits of literature. Hence it was, that the periodical literature of that age took its complexion, as it always does, from the prevailing taste of the community; and politics ceased, at least for a time, to interest the public. No sooner, however, did new circumstances arise to recall the attention of men to their political and religious interests, than the journals of the day followed in the track of popular opinion, and became an unerring index of its variations.

The era at which the periodical literature of England and Scotland evinced the most marked change in its spirit and character was one of unexampled interest. The policy adopted by George the Third, on his becoming Monarch of these realms, immediately formed the subject of keen and animated discussion. A variety of questions, connected with affairs both at home and abroad, were mooted in every circle, that divided the nation into parties, and afforded inexhaustible materials for the deliberation of the Legislature, the comments of journalists, and the consideration of the people.

The intrigues of the party supposed to influence the King; the excitement given to the public mind by the proceedings against Wilkes; the validity and legality of general warrants; and the constitutional questions that ensued, in relation to the privileges of members of parliament, — were topics which kept the public mind in a state of constant agitation, furnished the press with materials to work upon, and brought Junius into the field. But the political controversy most important in its nature, and in the consequences which it involved, arose out of the proceedings of the British parliament respecting the right of taxing America. The fierce disputations which this question occasioned, the critical position in which it placed the advisers of the Crown, and the unparalleled interest it gave to the debates in Parliament, conspired to give a political character to most works that issued from the press; and to mark with the same stamp the sentiments of all ranks of the community. Under the influence of circumstances so strongly calculated to make

an impression on the literature of the nation, most Reviews and Magazines became the organs of popular sentiment, and laboured in their several departments to furnish their readers with the mental food most congenial to their tastes. The periodical press contributed, in no ordinary degree, to enlighten and direct public opinion upon the topics which agitated the kingdom. The admission must, indeed, be made with regret, that its conductors were not all sufficiently virtuous to spurn official solicitations. Some of them were prevailed on to justify the wildest excesses of arbitrary power. There were many, however, more honourable and conscientious, who employed the powerful engine of which they had the control, to expose misgovernment, to warn the nation of its consequences, and to demand the punishment of its authors. The public mind was invigorated by the discussion of questions which grew out of the war. Men began to suspect, that it originated in a desire to give an ascendency to despotic principles; and that the daring experiment, if successful on the other side of the Atlantic, might some time be tried in England. The principles of government and the rights of man became, under circumstances so favourable to freedom of speech, the theme of discussion, in every private circle, at every public meeting, and in every periodical journal. The field of controversy was occupied by skilful and able combatants. Newspapers, Magazines, and Reviews were enriched with the contributions of the first scholars and most eminent politicians of the day. Appeals were made through the press, that abounded in learning, in cogent reasoning, and high-wrought sentiment. The understandings of mankind were cultivated, whilst their passions were deeply roused; and a spirit was kindled, in every part of the community, which continued to blaze out in fits of passionate excitement, until the French Revolution burst forth to dazzle and terrify the world.

From this memorable crisis in its affairs, the periodical press of Great Britain continued to increase in influence. Conducted on a comprehensive plan, aiming at objects of permanent utility, and bringing to the execution of its duties the highest order of intellect, the events which followed widened, to an unlimited extent, the sphere of its power. The Revolution in France may be said to have completed that change in the character and tendency of our periodical literature which had previously commenced. It furnished new subjects of investigation, gave circulation to novel theories and startling opinions, inflamed the passions of the populace; and was productive of as much extravagance and folly in the partisans of unlimited authority as in the wildest advocates of equality. Its effects on literary productions were no less remarkable and sudden, than on the political movements of society.

The influence of the French Revolution on literature, is strikingly evinced in the publications that denounced or vindicated its principles, lamented or rejoiced in its tendency. The originality of

thought, freedom of opinion, and power of style, displayed in these productions, present a singular contrast to the tame and uninteresting articles that used to form the staple commodity of the English press. Amongst the pamphlets of that day, those of Burke, Mackintosh, and Paine, made the most powerful impression. The age that could understand and appreciate those master-pieces of political controversy must have advanced considerably in intellectual cultivation. Their merits were canvassed by thousands; they were eagerly read by the great mass of the population; and the momentous topics of which they treated were as familiar to the mechanic and the artisan, as to the rulers of the nation, and the members of the two houses of the Legislature.

Looking at the French Revolution, therefore, in its political and intellectual effects, there can be no question that it has, on the whole, been favourable to liberty and to knowledge. Like all great convulsions, it brought in its train devastation, violence, and blood. Its excesses have furnished the enemies of political improvement with a weapon which they have employed to injure the cause of liberty. "The massacres of war," says a great author, recently removed from amongst us by the hand of death, "and the murders committed by the sword of justice, are disguised by the solemnities which invest them. But the wild justice of the people has a naked and undisguised horror. Its slightest exertion awakens all our indignation; while murder and rapine, if arrayed in the gorgeous disguise of acts of state, may with impunity stalk abroad. Our sentiments are reconciled to them in this form; and we forget that the ends of anarchy must be short-lived, while those of despotic government are fatally permanent."*

An unbiassed observer of the progress and results of the French Revolution must lament the frightful progeny of crime to which it gave birth; but he will likewise admit, that it called into action a brilliant display of genius, and accelerated the march of intellect. It is not surprising, that the despotism by which the French had been long enthralled, and the vices and ignorance of the court, the clergy, and the nobles, should have demoralized the people, and rendered them the dupes of unprincipled demagogues. Let it not be forgotten, however, that their mischievous doctrines were incapable of deluding a numerous class of moderate and intelligent politicians, who, with passions more subdued, with judgments more matured, and minds more deeply cultivated, could listen to the thunder as it rolled, and watch the heavings of the waves as they dashed their foam over diadems, coronets, and mitres, without being terrified, on the one hand, into the support of despotism as a refuge from revolution; or, on the other, becoming so enamoured of popular liberty as to rush into unbridled licentiousness.† That at a period of such

* Vindiciæ Gallicæ, by Sir James Mackintosh.

† Mr. Moore, in his "Life of Sheridan," makes the following sound observations

overwhelming interest, the people should have manifested an uncontrollable desire for political discussions, is not surprising. Amid the overthrow of dynasties and the crash of thrones, need we wonder that they threw aside, as puerile and unattractive, every publication that had not a direct reference to the new principles at work in the bosom of society? Moral dissertations, though stamped with the impress of genius; pictures of human life, though drawn with exquisite taste, and vivid with the colouring of reality; lost their power to awaken curiosity and command admiration. The reading portion of the community ceased to be amused with tales, allegories, and ethical disquisitions. Politics alone "wore a charmed life," and spell-bound the intellectual world. Our Reviews, no longer the repositories of stale facts, of vapid gossip, and an "asylum for destitute authors," aspired to instruct their readers in science, philosophy, and government; and the master spirits of the age, intent upon the wonderful scenes passing around them, employed them

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on the effects of the French Revolution upon the opinions of the partisans of arbitrary power and the friends of liberal principles: — "It was an event," says that eloquent writer, "by which the minds of men throughout all Europe were thrown into a state of such feverish excitement, that a more than usual degree of tolerance should be exercised towards the errors and extremes into which all parties were hurried during the paroxysm. There was, indeed, no rank or class of society whose interests and passions were not deeply involved in the question. The powerful and the rich, both of State and Church, must naturally have regarded with dismay the advance of a political heresy, whose path they saw strewed over with the broken talismans of rank and authority. Many, too, with a distinguished reverence for ancient institutions, trembled to see them thus approached by rash hands, whose talents for ruin were sufficiently certain, but whose powers of reconstruction had yet to be tried. On the other hand, the easy triumph of a people over their oppressors was an example which could not fail to excite the hopes of the many as actively as the fears of the few. The great problem of the natural rights of mankind seemed about to be solved in a manner most flattering to the majority; the zeal of the lover of liberty was kindled into enthusiasm, by a conquest achieved for his cause upon an arena so vast; and many, who before would have smiled at the doctrine of human perfectibility, now imagined they saw, in what the Revolution performed and promised, almost enough to sanction the indulgence of that splendid dream. It was natural, too, that the greater portion of that unemployed, and, as it were, homeless talent, which, in all great communities, is ever abroad on the wing, uncertain where to settle, should now swarm round the light of the new principles, — while all those obscure but ambitious spirits, who felt their aspirings clogged by the medium in which they were sunk, would as naturally welcome such a state of political effervescence, as might enable them, like enfranchised air, to mount at once to the surface. Amidst all these various interests, imaginations, and fears, which were brought to life by the dawn of the French Revolution, it is not surprising that errors and excesses, both of conduct and opinion, should be among the first products of so new and sudden a movement of the whole civilised world; — that the friends of popular rights, presuming upon the triumph that had been gained, should, in the ardour of pursuit, push on the vanguard of their principles somewhat further than was consistent with prudence and safety; or that, on the other side, Authority and its supporters, alarmed by the inroads of the revolutionary spirit, should but the more stubbornly intrench themselves in established abuses, and make the dangers they apprehended from liberty a pretext for proscribing its very existence." — Vol. ii. pp. 91—93.

as the most appropriate channels for conveying to the people their opinions upon every question affecting the freedom and happiness of the species.

An anonymous writer*, in reference to this subject, observes, "that the Reviews, which multiplied so rapidly after the French Revolution, occupy to a certain extent the ground of our Essayists, because they embody the floating good sense and opinions of the age; but they add more to the progress of ideas than of manners, and address themselves to the reason rather than to the fancy of their readers. On the other hand, the enthusiasm, splendour, and energy of the modern school of poetry, have produced a craving for strong excitement, and taught us to despise those light and delicate graces of execution, which are almost the only beauties consistent with the nature of Essays on life and manners. In short, no work can now be long popular, which does not either exercise the reason or stir the feelings strongly. The British Essayists do neither. Poetry and fiction have grown up side by side with philosophy, and writers who excel in either department will succeed; but those who, like some of the writers in the 'Spectator' and 'Tatler,' hold an intermediate place—who appeal to the reason without depth of thinking, and to the fancy without enthusiasm or passion—cannot enjoy a permanent degree of popularity."

The powerful impulse given to public opinion and intellectual improvement by the Revolution in France, was very sensibly felt in Scotland. Until the close of the American War, the Scotch were comparatively indifferent to political publications. This apathy may have been partly occasioned by their defective representative system, which, by depriving them of the rights of free citizens, diminished the interest they would have felt, under more favourable circumstances, in the events of the times. It is a remarkable fact, that, fifty years ago, there were not a dozen newspapers published in Scotland, and of that number not one was conducted with sufficient spirit and talent to influence in any considerable degree the opinions of the nation. They were little better than uninteresting chronicles of passing occurrences; compiled without judgment, and arranged without taste or skill. The editors were incompetent to instruct their readers on national policy; and, their political sentiments being, in general, of a servile character, they were not the most suitable agents to keep alive popular feeling, and to inspire the middle and lower classes of the community with a love of freedom. The weekly and monthly journals, with the exception of those already enumerated, were in no respect superior to the ordinary newspapers, equally devoid of useful information and political independence.

It has been previously observed, that the French Revolution cre-

* See a sensible and argumentative Essay on the causes of the declining popularity of the British Essayists, published in Constable's "Edinburgh Magazine," for, I believe, March, 1819.

ated a new class of readers and thinkers. The Scottish peasantry were qualified by their education, and their desire for the acquisition of knowledge, to profit by the improved publications which the altered spirit of the times called into existence. They read with avidity the productions which referred to political transactions. These were multiplied in proportion to the increased demand, and the anxiety of the people to become familiar with the questions which they discussed. It was observable that they assumed a more decided tone, and adapted their opinions to the state of public feeling. They were under the direction of men whose talents were known and appreciated; and the essays they contained were written in a plain, forcible style, calculated to arouse the excitable feelings of the populace. But at this important period, Edinburgh was without any periodical journal suited to the intelligence and taste of the citizens. The time, therefore, at which the conductors of the Edinburgh Review entered upon their undertaking, was well chosen. All classes, from the aristocrat to the labourer, had entered upon a course of mental and political training, which rendered them peculiarly susceptible to the impressions made by a work of eminent ability, professing to address itself to the understandings of its readers, and to enlighten them upon those subjects in which their religious and political liberties were concerned.

These were the principal causes which made the public hail the Edinburgh Review, on its first appearance, with so cordial a welcome; but there was another, of sufficient importance to be specified, though it may be ranked among the accidental circumstances which facilitated the purposes contemplated by the projectors of that journal. It has been shown, that the critical state of political affairs, both on the Continent and at home, soon after the French Revolution, gave ample scope to the speculations of the periodical press; and that the opinions advocated in the various publications of the day produced a greater effect, upon all classes of readers, than could have been anticipated under less favourable circumstances. The Edinburgh Review derived considerable advantage from those tendencies in the public mind, which disposed it to receive a favourable impression from the writings of those whose views were in accordance with that liberal and reforming spirit which had begun to effect a complete change in the frame and functions of society. The position of parties in Scotland had also a favourable influence on the success of the work. The Tories were powerful by their wealth, their station, and their close union. They clung firmly to the fundamental principles of their political faith, which were, an obstinate resistance to all change and a bigoted attachment to those institutions and forms of polity sanctioned by antiquity. The Whigs were superior to their adversaries in talent, eloquence, and in all those attractive qualifications calculated to gain the confidence of the multitude. Without adopting the extreme opinions and visionary theories of the partisans of democracy, they encouraged by their speeches and publications the

diffusion of moderate and rational principles of reform. Though opposed to sudden and extensive innovation, they were the advocates of constitutional changes, rendered necessary by the increase of wealth, the progress of general information, and the advancement of the great mass of the people in political knowledge. These principles naturally led them to support the cause of freedom in every part of Europe, and to oppose any undue interference with the rights of other nations in the pursuit of liberty. The grand characteristics of their domestic policy were,—the abolition of civil disabilities on account of religious belief; the gradual removal of abuses connected with our laws; the extinction of commercial monopolies; a more efficient and economical discharge of public duties; a gradual reduction of taxation; and the extension of mental cultivation among the working classes. A journal in which these enlightened and popular views were most ably advocated could not fail to create a very extraordinary sensation. It was admired by all the liberal party, which comprised a large portion of the aristocracy; by the most opulent of the mercantile classes; and by the best educated part of the middle orders. Even the Tories, though they could not assent to its political opinions, applauded the eloquence, ability, and fearlessness with which they were maintained; and so deeply impressed were they with apprehensions of the spread of revolutionary doctrines, that they regarded Whiggism as infinitely preferable to the wild and violent doctrines propagated by the anarchists of France. This circumstance induced them to look upon the Edinburgh Review with less jealousy than they would have evinced, had they not deemed it a necessary agent in correcting the absurd and theoretical notions, with respect to government and society, which then prevailed. Besides, they were conscious, perhaps, of their inferiority to their adversaries in intellectual power; and the ablest of that party did not permit political prejudices to cloud their judgment, as to the genius and information displayed in the favourite journal of the Whigs.

The circumstances now alluded to, added to the various and brilliant attainments of its principal conductors, gave the Edinburgh Review a circulation unrivalled in extent, not only through the three kingdoms, but in all parts of Europe. Its popularity exceeded the most sanguine expectations; and the productions of its contributors were received with the homage due to men who had given a new character to criticism, and created public opinion in their native land. In every circle, the merits of the Review were the theme of discussion. Disappointed authors condemned its supercilious tone; the enemies of political improvement declaimed against its jacobinical doctrines; and religious enthusiasts affected to discover the scorpion of infidelity lurking beneath the foliage of its wit. But men of taste and acquirements, to whatsoever party they professed to belong, duly valued the rich mental banquet which it afforded. Its speculations were perused by the leading political characters of

the day with intense interest. Its prophecies were meditated in the cabinets of kings; and Napoleon was not the only sovereign who respected the opinions it put forth. It was to be expected, that many of the critical decisions of the work, which were conveyed in a bold, unqualified, and caustic style, would rouse a spirit of retaliation. Accordingly, authors became indignant, and vented their spleen in angry effusions. The artillery of the press was brought into action, and fired off an astounding though harmless volley of pamphlets, letters, and rejoinders. Of these the editors deigned to notice a few only. Their antagonists speedily found that they were no less formidable in the arena of controversy than in that of critical warfare. In fact, the Edinburgh Review, soon after its appearance, overcame every difficulty with which literary envy and political hostility struggled to impede its progress. It instructed by its learning, animated by its spirit, and subdued opposition by its firmness and courage. An able writer has done justice to its general characteristics in the following remarks: — "It was the first periodical journal in Scotland, which, with any thing like a spirit of championship, came forth into the great arena of public controversy. It was the first, in fact, which manifested any trust in its own strength; which was conducted by men of talent and vigorous intellects, determined and energetic in the defence of good taste, and what they deemed necessary to human happiness; and which acted upon the only right principle of such works,—a rigid resolution to attack and hew down whatever polluted the purity of literature or stood opposed to truth. In looking over the whole series of the Edinburgh Review, from its commencement in 1802 to the present time, the most superficial observer can hardly fail of discovering the bold track it has followed through the wide field of general knowledge, the weight with which it has crushed the most noisome and prolific weeds that have risen in its path, and the unsparing hand with which it has wrenched them up, when deep-rooted and of long growth. But it is not by its particular criticisms, by its reviews of a single book or author, that it has obtained the power and influence it has so long possessed. It was discovered, that merely pointing out a few verbal blunders in a book, condemning or lauding some production of the day, in reference to its individual deserts only, or presenting isolated extracts of works, the substance of which it was impossible to give, would be infinitely less useful and influential than taking hold of the very subject itself to which a publication referred, giving extended and general views of the questions it involved, furnishing the reader with the rules and principles on which his decision ought to rest, and gathering into a close and compact digest the best arguments, the soundest opinions, or the most striking illustrations, of which any matter, either of taste or reason, admits. In conformity with this idea, the Edinburgh Review became the expounder of principles, the setter-forth of dogmas, the proud and lofty-toned denunciator; sometimes bearing out its decisions by a keen anatomy of some

contemporary work, but more frequently contenting itself with holding up the mirror of its philosophy, and leaving the reader to judge of truth and falsehood, beauty and deformity, by the lines he sees portrayed upon its surface. In one word, it has from time to time left authors, to attack systems; neglected to analyse a book, that it might develope a theory; lifted its lash, like a churlish pedagogue, against a poem or an essay; but stood forth in the full panoply of reason, when general truth was its object. It has spoken with a somewhat untempered tone of literature in detail, but has argued nobly on the universality of its power and excellence. It has sported in the wantonness of strength with whatever it found on the surface of the field, but dug with the earnestness of a miser where it traced signs of hidden wealth. It has mocked in determined scorn at ideas of conciliation or courtesy in criticism, but it has brought all authors to the same stern test of truth and propriety. It has neglected to satisfy curiosity on many books, but it has drawn a wide circle, by remark and investigation, which embraces almost all the subjects on which human thought can be employed."*

The narrow limits to which this Preface is unavoidably restricted, render it impossible to give a complete outline of the contents of the Review. But the reader will, perhaps, be enabled to form some estimate of its merits, if he be supplied with such general references as may convey to him a view of the subjects and information which it embraces. The most satisfactory method of accomplishing this object will be, to follow, as closely as possible, the classification of topics adopted in this compendium of the work, and to give an analysis of its most interesting articles. The plan is, perhaps, not the most exact that could have been devised; but it is sufficiently accurate and minute to answer the intended purpose.

The essays on Poetry and the Drama deserve to be first noticed. They occupy a large portion of the Review; and, for some years after its commencement, were more generally read and admired than any other description of articles. It has been understood, that the most attractive of them were from the pen of the late editor; and it is not difficult to trace, in their composition, abundant evidence of his fertile genius and exquisite taste. It is, however, from this department that the most conspicuous examples of critical inconsistency have been selected by those whom disappointed ambition or personal resentment, literary rivalry or political hostility, has induced to employ their talents in ransacking whole volumes for a single discrepancy, and in laughing at

* Character of the Edinburgh Review, by the Rev. Henry Stebbing.

beauties they were incompetent to appreciate. The Edinburgh Reviewers have been accused of criticising the most splendid productions of English poetry in a spirit of petty cavil and coxcombical pretension. They have, it is affirmed, changed their opinions so frequently and so capriciously, that it would be impossible to give a correct exposition of their views, or to collect, from their flighty speculations, any satisfactory proof of capacity to estimate poetical genius, and to feel the power of its inspiration. For example, in one of the early numbers, the "laws of poetry are said to be fixed and unchangeable, whose authority it is no longer permitted to doubt *;" and, soon afterwards, some modern poet is complimented for his boldness in striking out a new course, and disregarding the insipidity and feebleness of his predecessors, whose merit consisted in a rigid observance of certain assumed principles. At one time Pope, and the other writers belonging to his school, were lauded in a strain of laboured panegyric; whilst the older writers were spoken of in a tone of disparagement. At a subsequent period, when the altered taste of the nation no longer held in veneration the wits of Queen Anne's time, but turned, with unaffected homage, to the gigantic intellects that towered above all competition in the unrivalled age of Elizabeth, the Reviewers abandoned their favourite theories, and swam with the tide of popular feeling. It would be easy to adduce similar proofs of variation of opinion from critiques upon different works of the same author. But these vacillations may be acknowledged, without subjecting the writers to much, if any, censure. They grew unavoidably out of the method of conducting the Review. Each article was intended to be a disquisition on the subject of the book criticised. The author was desirous of displaying his own powers; and, as each number of the work consisted of a variety of productions from different contributors, it would be absurd to expect that any considerable uniformity should be maintained through a series of volumes during a period of thirty years. The readers of a critical journal expect to find in it something of novelty in the selection of topics, and in the style of composition. They are eager for what is new, and are disappointed if every dissertation be not characterised by qualities, in the thoughts and language, that strike and surprise. For this purpose, numerous minds must be employed to suit the work to the public taste. Among them, however agreed upon general principles, shades of distinction will be apparent, and contradictions must inevitably occur. It has been remarked, in reference to the discrepancies to be found in our best Reviews: — "We do not consider this as matter either of surprise or censure. A series of unconnected decisions, each resting upon its own specialities, pronounced perhaps by different judges of the same court, can scarcely afford coherent materials for compiling a code of laws. But,

* See Essay on the Lake School of Poetry, 1st vol. of this work, p. 427.

perhaps, the articles of a Review still more resemble the pleadings of an ingenious barrister upon various points of law, or the theses of a learned sophist on different points of controversy, in which the sole object, besides that of displaying the versatile genius of an advocate, is the maintaining some isolated and unconnected proposition by arguments; which, upon another occasion, may be changed or exploded, without incurring the charge of inconsistency. Thus, the same premises may be used, on various occasions, as authorising the most opposite conclusions. For example, the decided and extended popularity of one author may be represented as arising from his dealing more in the common-places of poetry than his contemporaries; and another may be consoled by the assurance that, if his work be caviare to the multitude, it is the more valuable to the few who can estimate the just representations of the most ordinary feelings of our nature, which are precisely those upon which the common-places of poetry are founded: nay, if it be necessary, both these propositions may be abandoned, to charge a third poet with want of popularity, as a conclusive sentence against him, pronounced by the silent practical judgment of the public. Now, although each of these dogmata may be supported by very plausible and ingenious reasoning, it must certainly puzzle any author, disposed to act under such high authority, to discover whether, by using the most hackneyed language and subjects of his art, he is most likely to secure the applause of the multitude, or that only of the select few; and if he should determine on pursuing the road to popularity, recommended in the reviewer's latest opinion, he would be still uncertain whether, when attained, it is to be considered as a mark of merit or reprobation." *

This is not an exaggerated statement of the inconsistencies to which all periodical journals are liable, that are conducted upon the present plan. But every one not biassed by party or personal considerations, sees that a Review is to be judged of by all that it contains, and not by garbled extracts from a few critiques. "A certain tone of exaggeration," says an eminent contributor to the Edinburgh Review, "is incident to the sort of writing in which we are engaged. Reckoning a little too much, perhaps, on the dulness of our readers, we are often led, unconsciously, to overstate our sentiments in order to make them understood; and, when a little controversial warmth is added to a little love of effect, an excess of colouring is apt to steal over the canvass, which ultimately offends no eye so much as our own." †

This will account for many of the rash judgments of the Edinburgh critics upon other authors besides Burns, to whom the preceding remarks were designed to apply. That they were mistaken in some instances, and unnecessarily severe and contemptuous in

* Essay on Periodical Criticism, in the Annual Register for 1809, p. 570.
† See Edinburgh Review, vol. xxxi. p. 492.

others, must be admitted. But if we would judge fairly of any article, we must carry ourselves back to the period when it was written, and try it by the standards then in existence. The article on Byron has been much condemned; but we venture to say, that, had "Childe Harold" not been written, few would have objected to it: and who will blame the Reviewer for not detecting the future "Childe" in the "Hours of Idleness?"

In the articles on the poetry of Wordsworth and Southey, there is much ingenuity in the exposition of the metaphysical theory upon which the Lake School is founded. The error of the Reviewers lies in their caricaturing, with too much bitterness, the offensive peculiarities of its founders. Their object was to prove that their poetical tenets are fundamentally erroneous. Many competent judges conceived that this position was established; but it was at the same time obvious, that the style of criticism was not calculated to qualify the reader for forming an unbiassed judgment of works against which he had been prejudiced by the ludicrous specimens laid before him. It has been said that the Edinburgh critics have never given a fair portion of commendation to the talents of Wordsworth and Southey. This is not true. They have eulogised in the strongest terms their capacity to instruct and delight mankind. Their most unbounded censures have been intermingled with flattering expressions of regard and admiration for their accomplishments. They have characterised their productions as distinguished by "fertility and force, by warmth of feeling and exaltation of imagination; and pronounced them to be superior, in spite of their extreme affectation and babyish simplicity, to those of every other poet except Milton and Shakspeare."

Periodical writers of no mean authority have affected to despise some of the cleverest dissertations in the Review on the Lake School of Poets, and have affirmed that they possess no other claim to admiration than the grace, polish, and brilliancy of the language in which they are clothed. This is not the place to investigate critically the theories of the Reviewers on this interesting subject of controversy, which they have defended with a power of intellect and an exuberance of fancy that have seldom been equalled.

If a superficial reader of the Edinburgh Review were to form his judgment of its critiques from the few articles of dubious reputation to which allusion has now been made, or from the comments of its enemies, he might be led to suppose, that its principal contributors have been frequently unjust in their estimates of contemporary genius; that no living writers have escaped their "gibes and jeers;" that they have attempted to destroy "at one fell swoop" the rising celebrity of every aspiring candidate for literary fame; and that all the names, now most venerated in the world of letters, have been abused without mercy, noticed with reluctance, or dismissed with contempt. But such an opinion would be totally without foundation. The attack on the "Hours of Idleness," the

ludicrous critique on the Lyrical Ballads, the alleged caricatures of Southey and Coleridge, the cold reception of Graham, and the sarcasms on Montgomery, are not very inexpiable faults. But admitting them to be all that their enemies represent, what then? Are some half dozen articles, however unfair, to rough down whole volumes of the most luminous and profound criticism? Are the splendid disquisitions which have appeared in the Review, upon Shakspeare, Milton, Dryden, Byron, Scott, Moore, Campbell, Rogers, Crabbe, and many others, to be forgotten, because "The Vision of Judgment" was held up to public scorn?

Concerning the theories advocated by the Reviewers, on the different schools of poetry, considerable difference of opinion prevails. They were fairly open to discussion; and no ordinary ability has been manifested in attempts to demonstrate their fallacy. An honourable disputant would bear testimony to the quickness of discernment, — the acuteness, — richness of fancy, — variety of illustration, and felicity of language, so apparent in many of these Essays. Such, however, is not the spirit in which they have been occasionally criticised. But the Reviews of "Gertrude of Wyoming;" "Marmion;" "Thalaba;" "Tales of the Hall;" Manfred;" "Childe Harold;" "Lalla Rookh," &c., will charm and instruct thousands of readers, long after the impertinent cavils of envious commentators have been buried in oblivion.

The miscellaneous articles on Poetry and the Drama are numerous and interesting. Of these we could admit only a few of the best into these Selections. It is almost unnecessary to direct the attention of the reader to the Essays on "Spanish Poetry;" on the state of "English Literature during the Reigns of Elizabeth and James;" on the "Character of English Poetry from the Reign of Queen Anne to the present Times;" on the "Progress and Decline of Poetry;" on the "History of the Drama;" and on the "Life and Works of Lord Byron." It would be useless to dwell on the acknowledged merit of these compositions. On a perusal of the contributions to this department of the Edinburgh Review, it is observable, that the faults to which the least forbearance is shown, are such as tend to bring the poetical character into disrepute. The heaviest rebukes have fallen upon those peculiarities of taste and phraseology which exercise a pernicious influence over the faculties of the poet, and diminish his power of ministering to intellectual pleasure and improvement. Affectation, dogmatism, and perverted simplicity, are the blemishes which the Reviewers have been most anxious to remove. They have never hesitated to denounce what appeared silly, feeble, and ludicrous. But the nobler attributes of poetry, such as are to be found in the writings of Milton, Byron, Campbell, and Shelley, have been criticised in a kindred spirit, and with the feelings of men who knew how to appreciate the efforts of real and lofty genius. Nor have they ever shrunk from the duty of censuring those defects

in the works of popular authors, which they conceived to be either dangerous to public morals, or calculated to vitiate the popular taste.

The Reviewers have seldom adverted to their own merits, unless when stimulated to defend their character and motives against the slanders of anonymous traducers. It is only an act of justice to subjoin the following extracts from their critique on Wilson's "City of the Plague:"—"Hardly as we have been accused of dealing with some poetical adventurers, we flatter ourselves that we have always manifested the greatest tenderness and consideration for the whole tuneful brotherhood. There are some faults, indeed, to which we have found it impossible to show any mercy. But to all those errors that arise out of the poetical temperament, or are at least consistent with its higher attributes, we venture to assert, that we have been uniformly indulgent in a very remarkable degree; and have shown more favour than any critics ever did before us to extravagance and exaggeration, when springing from a genuine enthusiasm; to redundant or misplaced description, when arising out of a true love of nature or of art; and even to a little sickliness or weakness of sentiment, whenever it could be traced to an unaffected kindness of heart, or tenderness of fancy. There are faults, however, as we have already hinted, incident to this branch of literature, for which we have little toleration; but we cannot think that our severity towards them should be construed into any want of indulgence to poets in general, since they are all of a kind that can only affect those who have a genuine veneration for the poetical character, and consist chiefly of apparent violations of its dignity or honour. Among the first and most usual, we might mention the indications of great conceit and self-admiration, when united with ordinary talents. Excellence in poetry is so high and rare an excellence, as not only to eclipse, but to appear contrasted with, all moderate degrees of merit. It has a tone and a language of its own, therefore, which it is a mere impertinence in ordinary mortals to usurp: and when a writer of slender endowments assumes that which is only allowed to the highest, he not only makes his defects more conspicuous, but provokes and disgusts us by the manifest folly and vanity of his pretensions, which unlucky qualities come naturally to strike us as the most prominent and characteristic of his works, and effectually indispose us towards any trifling though real merits they may happen to possess. Another and a more intolerable fault, as more frequently attaching to superior talents, is that perversity or affectation which leads an author to distort or disfigure his compositions, either by a silly ambition of singularity, an unfortunate attempt to combine qualities that are really irreconcileable, or an absurd predilection for some fantastic style or manner, in which no one but himself can perceive any fitness or beauty. In such cases we are not merely offended by the positive deformities which are thus produced, but by the feeling that they are produced

wilfully, and with much effort; and by the humiliating spectacle they afford of the existence of paltry prejudices and despicable vanities in minds which we naturally love to consider as the dwelling-place of noble sentiments and enchanting contemplations. Akin to this source of displeasure, but of a more aggravated description, is that which arises from the visible indication of any great moral defect in those highly gifted spirits, whose natural office it seems to be to purify and exalt the conceptions of ordinary men, by images more lofty and refined than can be suggested by the coarse realities of existence. We do not here allude so much to the loose and luxurious descriptions of love and pleasure which may be found in the works of some great masters, as to the traces of those meaner and more malignant vices which appear still more inconsistent with the poetical character — the traces of paltry jealousy and envy of rival genius — of base servility and adulation to power or riches — of party profligacy, or personal spite or rancour — and all the other low and unworthy passions which excite a mingled feeling of loathing and contempt, and not only untune the mind for all fine or exalted contemplations, but at once disenchant all the fairy scenes whose creation must be referred to the agency of spirits so degraded." *

Next to the criticisms on Poetry and the Drama, the articles in the Review most likely to attract the general reader by their diversity of matter and elegance of composition, are those in which sketches are given of eminent divines, philosophers, statesmen, orators, historians, novelists, and critics. It has been thought advisable, therefore, to allot considerable space to this department, though the Editor has been obliged to omit many articles of great merit; among which are characters of Frederick the Great, Washington, Bonaparte, Carnot, Fouché, Robertson, Froissart, Lingard and Hume, Grattan, and Maturin. Of those that have been transferred to this work, some are conspicuous for their multifarious research, their extensive knowledge of literature in all its branches, and their just appreciation of character. The contributors are understood to embrace many of the ablest political writers of the present century. It is superfluous to bespeak attention to the elaborate disquisition on the Greek, Roman, and modern historians; the lively and discriminating critique on our most popular novelists; the eloquent sketches of Richter, Schiller, and Goethe; and the review of the writings of Machiavelli. This last article is the production of a mind richly stored with learning, distinguished by the depth and variety of its resources, its comprehensive grasp, and the independence of its speculations.

Under the head of "Miscellaneous Literature," eight articles have been classed, in which is embodied a great variety of interest-

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xxvi. p. 450.

ing information. That on German Literature and Philosophy is a masterly performance. It analyses the causes which have hitherto prevented the literary men of this country from attaching a due value to the intellectual productions of Germany. It replies to the objections which have been urged against their character and excellence. Ample justice is done to the extraordinary talents of Wieland, Klopstock, the Jacobis, Mendleshon, Fichte, and Goethe. On the subject of German Poetry, its progress, and the changes it has undergone, there are many profound and beautiful observations. Kant's philosophy is expounded with singular clearness; and there is a powerful vindication of other philosophical systems peculiar to that nation, which seem to have been but imperfectly understood by previous commentators.

The Essay on the "Comparative State of Literature in England and France," has been attributed to Mr. Chenevix, the author of a work, recently published, on "National Character." He is also said to be the writer of two other articles, which excited a good deal of attention at the time of their publication, concerning the relative claims of the two countries with regard to science and industry. That which has been introduced into the present work is replete with valuable knowledge. An estimate is given of the character of French philosophy, rhetoric, literary criticism, oratory, and history, which displays extensive research. But the French accuse, and not without reason, the author of undue prejudice against them.

Lord Byron has given to Mr. Thomas Moore the credit of writing the lively and agreeable criticism on the "Religious and Literary Merits of the Fathers of the Church." It has all the characteristics of his style of composition; and abounds in that playful wit and keen sarcasm, which characterise some of his satirical compositions.

The Review of "Southey's Colloquies" is an admirable specimen of criticism; severe, but polished and dignified. To the private qualities, and superior literary attainments of Mr. Southey, adequate praise is awarded; but no tenderness is shown to his political inconsistencies, his bitter intolerance, and his erroneous opinions on the present condition of society. His views of political economy are shown to be radically wrong, and his anticipations of the future prospects of the world to be more desponding than facts would justify. The articles on the "Progress of Historical Writing in England;" on the "Literature of the Middle Ages;" and on the "Signs of the Times," are entitled to the encomiums which they have received from various quarters. The "Spirit of Society in England and France" forms the subject of an interesting and well-written paper, published in a recent number of the Review, and which has since attracted considerable attention. The characteristics of English and French society are graphically delineated; and the observations on the education of females, and their influence

on the community, evince sound judgment. It was the wish of the Editor to assign a greater number of articles to this division; but he found it impossible to do so without rejecting other valuable matter.

The historical Essays in the Edinburgh Review have acquired a high reputation. Nine of the most interesting articles have been reprinted in this work. They contain an accurate and comprehensive sketch of the partitions of Poland, and the political history of Prussia, Austria, and Denmark. There is also a full account of the constitution of Venice, and of the fall of Parga. The reader will find, in these valuable treatises, a general view of the most important political transactions of the last thirty years. The memorable events which characterised the reigns of Elizabeth and her successors, down to the Revolution of 1688, are ably discussed in the Review of Hallam's popular work on the History of England, from which copious extracts have been given. Great pains have been taken to render this department of the work as full and interesting as possible. The articles exhibit deep research into the civil and political history of the kingdoms to which they refer, are written in a philosophical spirit, breathe the most uncompromising hostility to despotism, and advocate free institutions in all parts of the world.

From the articles on Metaphysics and Moral Science it has been the aim of the Editor to make a choice selection. The fact ought not to be concealed, that the Edinburgh Review has been less abundantly supplied with contributions of striking excellence in this department than in most others. Perhaps there is some foundation for the charge, that it has manifested a reluctance to enter upon the discussion of subjects relating to the philosophy of mind. Many works of high reputation, connected with mental science, have been passed over without notice. Morals have experienced similar neglect. From whatever cause this has arisen, it is matter of regret, that the late Editor did not more frequently enlighten his readers with speculations of a philosophical character. A contemporary critic has truly observed, that upon no subject has he displayed more of his characteristic acuteness, than upon those where metaphysics are treated, either separately, or as applied to practical subjects. There is a force, a dignity, a simplicity, and a precision in his mode of expression, peculiarly fitted not only to impress upon the reader the importance of the subject, but to delight the attention which he has previously fixed. He never uses words of a dubious import, or in an imperfect sense; his illustrations, although numerous and splendid, never exhibit that doubtful analogy which tends to mislead the reader, or bewilder him in the puzzling consequences of an imperfect and inaccurate parallel. The Reviewer not only comprehends all which he means to say, but he has the happy art of expressing himself in language as plain as it is precise, and of con-

veying, in the most distinct manner, to every reader of moderate intelligence, the propositions which his own mind has conceived with so much accuracy. It is but his just praise to say, that, as a guide through the misty maze of speculative philosophy, none has trod with a firmer step, or held equally high a torch which has glowed so clearly.*

Another cause for the apparent coldness of the Edinburgh Review towards works of a metaphysical kind, may, perhaps, be ascribed to the repugnance, then prevalent, and which still exists, to investigations of an abstract and intricate nature. It is impossible not to lament, that it did not make a strenuous effort to reclaim the public taste from the degeneracy into which it had sunk, in relation to intellectual philosophy. It has been justly observed by a contributor to another Scottish journal, that the "present age is, on many momentous subjects of enquiry, exceedingly superficial, and that the desire for philosophical speculation has perished in the intensity of feeling and the blaze of sentiment. The mighty masters of reason are now postponed, without scruple, to the experienced ministers of enjoyment; and the toils of deep and anxious speculation are willingly exchanged for the charms of a momentary impulse, and the attractions of an immediate but transitory reputation." These remarks are not intended to insinuate that the Edinburgh Review does not contain many articles of undoubted value on philosophical subjects. The few specimens introduced into these Selections will be sufficient to show, that talent of a high order was employed to enrich this portion of the Review. They are the productions of master minds, fully competent to elucidate the more abstruse branches of knowledge. The "Exposition of Kant's Philosophy" requires no other recommendation than the name of its author, the late Dr. Thomas Brown. Considering the mystical nature of the topics it is designed to explain, it may be regarded as a perspicuous and searching analysis of a system which had not been previously understood, except by a very few. It is to be lamented, that Dr. Brown sent so few articles to the Review. He was peculiarly qualified, by his powerful intellect, his profound acquaintance with mental science, and the nature of his studies, to increase its celebrity and usefulness. His contributions, on philosophical subjects, would have tended to inspire a taste for such enquiries, and to diffuse more widely the species of information by which their cultivation would have been best promoted.

The strictures on "Reid's Philosophy," cannot fail of being read with interest. Independent of their merit as an able and eloquent commentary on the theory of that eminent philosopher, they derive additional importance from the controversy to which they gave rise between the Review and Mr. Stewart. The nature of this controversy will be understood by referring to the Preliminary Dissertation to Mr. Stewart's "Philosophical Essays," to the splendid reply

* Sir Walter Scott.

which subsequently appeared in the Review, and to an article on that reply published in the "Quarterly Review."

"Alison's Theory of Taste" forms the subject of an article which has been appropriately characterised as one of the most "brilliant and masterly disquisitions in the whole compass of our philosophical literature." Its object is to demonstrate the soundness of Mr. Alison's theory, which the author has accomplished by a train of reasoning the most forcible and convincing. As a model of composition, it may enter into competition with the best productions of ancient or modern times. The fascination of language was never more conspicuously exhibited; the thoughts are striking and beautiful; and the illustrations partake of the richness and grandeur of the scenes from which they are drawn.

To Sir James Mackintosh has been assigned the merit of writing the two Reviews of "Dugald Stewart's Introductory Dissertations to the Encyclopædia Britannica;" and it is a distinction of which he might justly feel proud. Those noble discourses could not have been reviewed by any one so well qualified to estimate the "originality and depth of the reflections and reasonings contained in them, and the majesty and beauty of the language in which they are expressed." * In addition to a skilful outline of Mr. Stewart's Dissertations, on the excellence of which he has passed a discriminating and glowing encomium, he has given a most interesting exposition of the various systems of philosophy, which have prevailed, at different epochs, in the progress of metaphysical, ethical, and political science. This disquisition is enriched with biographical and critical sketches of the most illustrious philosophers, jurists, moralists, and divines. Among these may be enumerated, Bacon, Sir Thomas More, Machiavel, Aquinas, Descartes, Grotius, Puffendorf, Hobbes, Locke, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Wedgwood, Bayle, Hume, Montaigne, Addison, Barrow, and Jeremy Taylor. We look upon these two critiques as the highest tributes of commendation that could have been conferred upon the genius of Stewart, and as the best proofs of the erudition and deep thinking of Mackintosh.

The articles on "Cousin's Course of Philosophy," and on "Reid and Brown," are full of useful information; and afford abundant matter for investigation and argument to those who are conversant with the philosophical systems upon which they are commentaries.

Education is a subject to which the Edinburgh Review has devoted its attention with a zeal and perseverance worthy of the cause, and of the enlightened writers who have dedicated so large a portion of their labours, as public journalists, to its advancement. It may be useful to advert to the spirit and tendency of the

* Mr. Napier's Preface to the Supplement to the Encyclopædia Britannica, p. 32.

most important articles in that department, as only a few have been transferred to this work. The controversy which took place in 1805 between Joseph Lancaster and Dr. Bell, on the comparative merits of their respective systems of education, afforded the Edinburgh Reviewers an opportunity of advocating the necessity and utility of instructing the poor. Many persons recollect the sensation that was created among the enemies of knowledge, when that benevolent Quaker first gave to the world his novel and striking views upon the question of extending the blessings of information to the lowest ranks in society. The violence and asperity with which his project was attacked will not be soon forgotten. He was assailed by the most odious calumnies and misrepresentations; and he would probably have sunk under the storm to which he was exposed, had it not been for his own prodigious exertions, aided by the cordial support of the honest portion of the periodical press. He had to contend with two classes of opponents. First, there were the alarmists of that day, who pretended to foresee every species of evil, social and political, from the diffusion of knowledge among the people. Secondly, there were the bigoted partisans of the High Church, who prophesied the downfall of religion from the spread of a plan which united all classes and denominations in the general purposes of education, and excluded proselytism from the schools. To recapitulate the arguments brought forward by the Reviewers in refutation of these plausible but hollow objections, would lead into a wide field of discussion. It will be sufficient to observe, that their victory over the champions of ignorance and the votaries of sectarianism was most triumphant. Their services to the cause of national education, during the progress of that interesting disputation, had a powerful influence in opening the eyes of the people to the delusion attempted to be practised upon them. The religious character of the Review was furiously attacked, in consequence of its strenuous defence of a liberal method of popular education. The hackneyed cry of "The Church is in danger!" resounded from all quarters; and "infamous creatures were to be found, who, for the sake of some paltry distinction in the world, were ready to accuse conspicuous persons of scepticism — to turn common informers for the Establishment — and to convert the most beautiful feelings of the human heart to the destruction of the good and great, by fixing upon distinguished talents the indelible stigma of irreligion." These dishonourable artifices were treated with the contempt they deserved: and the able writers who gave their assistance to Mr. Lancaster when he was persecuted and slandered, continued their efforts in his behalf until his system had worked its way in spite of every obstacle, and placed the facilities of learning within the reach of many thousands of poor children.*

* The various articles on the subject of the controversy between Bell and Lancaster, that appeared in the Edinburgh Review, are referred to in a note to one of the Essays on Education, embodied in this work.

Several excellent articles of a general kind, in reference to the education of the working classes, appeared in the Review, at different times, until 1816, when the present Lord Chancellor was the means of attracting public attention to the subject, by moving for a Parliamentary Committee to enquire into the state of instruction among the lower orders in the metropolis. The appointment of that Committee, their protracted labours, their Report, Lord Brougham's Education Bill, and the discussion which it produced in Parliament, and among the friends of education in all parts of the country, furnished materials for a series of spirited and useful dissertations, in the Review, both on the vital topic of national education, and on the incidental but no less momentous question connected with it, viz. the perversion of charitable establishments. The impediments which so long retarded the accomplishment of the first great measure were removed, after repeated and earnest discussions, by the force of public opinion. There were, however, obstacles to the other which required equal integrity and firmness to subdue. Fraudulent oppression was not without its supporters, and they laboured, with incessant zeal, to oppose Lord Brougham's education enquiry. Aware that publicity would be the death-blow to corruption, their object was to stifle investigation in its infancy; to protect from public scrutiny the monstrous abuses in the funds designed for general instruction; and to malign the character of those who were desirous of seeing them honestly administered. The journal whose services are now under consideration was the most conspicuous ally in furthering this most useful and necessary of all Reforms. Amidst obloquy and falsehood it proceeded unwavering in its upright course; and the result was, that the sense of the country was roused — that the prejudices against innovation gradually died away — and that all classes became more anxious to see a system established for diffusing universally, and fixing upon a permanent basis, the education of the people. The bill brought in to the House of Commons to accomplish this object was lost. The causes of its failure need not be recapitulated here. Its main provisions were defended with distinguished ability by the Edinburgh Review; though many persons conceived that the grounds of its advocacy were opposed to the arguments maintained, some years previously, in that journal, with regard to the exclusive system of Dr. Bell. The Reviewers have clearly shown, that their support of Lord Brougham's project involved them in no inconsistency; and that their views on both occasions were in substance the same.* It is quite manifest from their articles on this interesting subject, that their intention was to reconcile, if possible, the religious differences which had been awakened by some regulations in the Bill, connected with the influence of the Church; and to induce each of the contending parties to "concede as much as might fairly be

* See an admirable article on this subject in the number of the Review for March, 1821.

asked to the opinions of the other, and to conquer its peculiar prejudices for the sake of a vast good to mankind." These efforts were not kindly received by some of the Dissenters, who entertained conscientious scruples concerning the tendency of the Bill. There can be no question, however, that the conductors of the Review were convinced that every attempt to establish a system for educating the poor together would be defeated, without mutual concessions from the partisans of all creeds and confessions. Those who dissented most widely from their reasoning and conclusions could not mistake the disinterested motives by which they were actuated. They wrote six admirable articles on the Report of the Education Enquiry, and on the System of National Instruction submitted to the Legislature by Lord Brougham. They are productions of inestimable value for the information they contain respecting Charity Abuses, and the ample funds in existence, which, if judiciously and honestly appropriated, would defray the expense of educating the whole people.

The establishment of literary and scientific institutions, for the intellectual improvement of artisans and mechanics, afforded another favourable occasion for the Edinburgh Review to exercise its influence for the benefit of society. The same class of individuals who raised so disgraceful an opposition, some years before, to the spread of information among the rising generation, again rendered themselves obnoxious by their hostility to Mechanics' Institutes. It was of importance that their illiberality should be exposed, and their shallow reasoning overthrown. They had no power to stop the march of human improvement; but they were not without the means of annoying and traducing those who accelerated its progress. The contributors to the Review undertook to chastise these foes to the best interests of mankind. They availed themselves of every suitable opportunity to unmask their designs, and disclose the real objects of their affected fears and unfounded clamours. In 1823, the Edinburgh Review directed the attention of its readers to the necessity and importance of early moral education, and pointed out, in a clear and well-written article, the advantages of Infant Schools. On the formation of the "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge," it ably advocated the objects of that excellent institution; and the various works on science, history, biography, and philosophy, published under its auspices, have been criticised and commended; in some instances, perhaps, quite as much as they deserved. It has also offered many valuable suggestions on the benefits of reading societies, book clubs, public lectures, &c.

While an adequate share of attention has been allotted by the Reviewers to the instruction of the poor, that of the rich has not been forgotten. At the commencement of their labours they discussed, in several clever disquisitions, the utility of classical acquirements. They examined the system of instruction adopted in our

colleges and public schools, and exposed its vices and defects. Their articles on the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and London are peculiarly interesting; and there is reason to believe that they have been of essential service in promoting an efficient reform in all our academical institutions. The intellectual cultivation of the female sex is a matter of deep interest, which has been frequently discussed in the Review. The articles on that subject will be read with great pleasure, and admired for the sound and enlightened views they take of the liberal education which women should receive.

Having made these general remarks on the manner in which education has been treated in the Review, it will be unnecessary to give a minute account of the articles on that subject, which have been selected for this work. They refer to the important topics of female education; the utility of classical learning; the expediency of a legislative provision for the instruction of the poor; the best means of promoting the scientific improvement of the working classes; the efforts of the Irish Church for the education of the poor of Ireland; and the Oxford and London Universities. The last-mentioned Essay is a masterly defence of the principles upon which the London Institution is founded. It was clearly demonstrated, in the article on the Lancasterian System, that the elementary branches of instruction might be taught without at the same time inculcating any particular creed. The same line of argument has been applied to the higher walks of literature; and the Reviewers have proved, that the means of a scientific and literary education can be provided, at a cheap rate, for the rich and middle classes of the community, without any exclusion or preference on account of religion. As they truly observe, "the monopoly of some, and the undue influence of others, may be destroyed by the operation of this great principle; but it will advance the species, both safely and rapidly, in the great race of moral and intellectual improvement."

The friends of Civil and Religious liberty are under lasting obligations to the Edinburgh Review for its steady and unvarying support of those liberal principles, which it has maintained with so much firmness and energy against the combined influence of prejudice, ignorance, and selfishness. To all penalties and disabilities, on account of religious opinions, it has been uniformly opposed. The first number of that journal contained an effective appeal in favour of Catholic emancipation; and, during the progress of nearly thirty years, it never relaxed in its exertions to enlighten the public mind on the bearings of that great question. Many powerful articles were written to enforce its importance, to remove popular misconceptions concerning it, and to convince the Legislature of the advantages that would result from its early settlement on a sound and permanent basis.

It has not been thought necessary to select more than one of the numerous Essays, on the rights of the Catholics, contained in the original work. It was difficult to make a judicious preference; but after some consideration, the last that appeared, after the Emancipation Bill had become the law of the land, was chosen. Able and convincing as are all the contributions on that interesting subject, the article with which the Reviewers closed their labours in behalf of an oppressed and persecuted body of people, is one of the best. It contains a pretty complete exposition of the history, effects, and final settlement of a question which the Edinburgh Review did far more to advance, and bring to a successful issue, than any other periodical journal.

The claims of the Dissenters were advocated in its pages with equal ability and earnestness. One Essay has been given as an example. It contains a sketch of the disqualifying laws to which that respectable and independent body were subjected before the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts. The rights of government are accurately defined with respect to the punishment of any class or denomination for holding peculiar religious opinions. Conclusive arguments are brought forward to prove, that the Established Church was not likely to gain proselytes from the persecution of Dissenters; that their admission to the privileges of office would be attended with no danger; and that the obnoxious penal laws then in force were utterly inefficient as a protection to the Church of England from the hostility of its enemies.

On the disabilities under which the Jews still labour, but which it is to be hoped a reformed Parliament will speedily abolish, there is a very interesting article. In this admirable specimen of logical reasoning, there is a searching examination of the arguments usually employed to justify the exclusion of the Jews from political power. The idea that their religion unfits them for being legislators or magistrates, is shown to be absurd. The reasons drawn from Scripture against their emancipation are proved to be fallacious. Upon the whole, it is an unanswerable vindication of the privileges of a race of people whose exclusion from the rights of citizens cannot be justified, except on the frivolous grounds upon which it was so long contended that it was just and expedient to persecute the Catholics and Dissenters.

Under the head of Civil and Religious Liberty, two other articles have been added, which ought to be read and studied by those who are fond of attaching the stigma of persecution to particular Churches and sects. The first comprises a brief and interesting epitome of the history of toleration. The writer has produced abundant evidence to demonstrate, what statesmen, divines, and philosophers have been reluctant to admit, that "persecution has not resulted from any particular system, but from the prevalence of ignorance, and the force of those illiberal prejudices which are natural to the mind of untutored man." In support of this position, he adduces

several pertinent examples of intolerance in the conduct of the Church of England and that of Scotland. He analyses, with great conciseness and perspicuity, the causes of the animosities which formerly prevailed between the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians; and adopts the opinion, that the diffusion of knowledge will ultimately extinguish religious persecution; "restrain the pride and selfishness of mankind; correct their false notions of duty; and open more distinct and enlarged views of the real interests of nations." The second Essay may be considered as a sequel to the preceding one. It is on the Toleration of the Reformers, and imparts a great deal of valuable information on the progress of the Reformation in Scotland. The great men concerned in that event were, it appears, hostile to religious freedom, taken in an enlarged sense, and to the right of private judgment. This fact the author of the article establishes, by referring to their avowed object of extirpating the Catholic Church. He gives an account of a curious conference between Lethington and John Knox, illustrative of the persecuting spirit by which the first Reformers were influenced; and replies to the ingenious apology which Dr. M'Crie has made for the latter individual in his excellent "Life of Knox." The principles of that eminent man, as exemplified in his writings and religious policy, form the subject of some acute remarks. The benefits of the Reformation are impartially enumerated; and the article concludes with a moderate and discriminating encomium on the character of the Church of Scotland as it at present exists.

To the extensive department of Politics a sufficient number of articles has been assigned to present the reader with a faithful record of the opinions of the Edinburgh Review upon every subject of importance connected with the various branches of political science. Essays of this description comprise the larger portion of the original work. It could scarcely be expected, therefore, that the selections from a mass of information, extending over some thousands of pages, should occupy more space, in the plan of this publication, than what has been allotted to them. It has been the aim of the Editor to diversify the topics, and to give one or two articles on each. They refer to the most interesting questions on foreign and domestic politics, that have engaged public attention from the commencement of the French Revolution to the present time, — to the fundamental principles of government, — to an exposition of the leading doctrines of political economy, — to reform in the whole system of our political, civil, criminal, and ecclesiastical laws, — to trade and finance, — and to the colonial policy adopted by different ministries. The most convenient arrangement, in reference to these dissertations, will be, to consider them under the following heads, though the arrangement differs in some degree from the order in which they are placed in the

volumes:—Foreign, General, and Miscellaneous Politics; Political Economy; Law and Jurisprudence.

Before giving a concise analysis of those on "Foreign Politics," it may not be deemed improper to advert, briefly, to the attacks which have been made on the character of the Edinburgh Reviewers on account of their opinions and predictions respecting the war with France. Their opponents have taunted them with being the apologists of Bonaparte, — with depreciating the efforts and undervaluing the resources of England, in her arduous struggle to defeat his attempts at universal dominion. It has been alleged, that they represented him as invincible, and spoke with derision of his adversaries; that they advocated principles derogatory to the character and insulting to the feelings of Englishmen; and that their most confident prophecies were falsified by subsequent events. It is worthy of remark, that the individuals by whom these imputations were disseminated were the organs of a party, whose invariable policy was to brand every man as an enemy to the freedom and glory of England who presumed to question the justice and policy of her contest with France, to condemn the manner in which it was carried on, and to point out its manifold evils. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Edinburgh Reviewers should be stigmatised by that class of politicians as Jacobins, Revolutionists, and traitors to the cause of British liberty. It is only necessary to refer to the spirit and principles of the numerous articles in that journal, on those momentous topics, for a triumphant defence against such aspersions.

The accusation that the Edinburgh Reviewers were the zealous champions of Napoleon, is untrue. Of that illustrious man they never wrote in any other terms than those of admiration for his talents, hatred of his tyranny, and exultation at his fall. It cannot be denied that, at one period of his career, they regarded with apprehension his power, influence, and authority; but it was because his unrivalled genius, sagacity, valour, and decision, rendered him more formidable than the antagonists with whom he had to grapple. The cry of disaffection and cowardice was raised against those who honestly expressed their sentiments upon the critical situation in which England was placed, on more than one occasion during the progress of the war, and who enforced the necessity of more active and efficient preparations. The Edinburgh Reviewers recommended a wise and a bold course. Regardless of the sneers and calumnies of the ministerial party, who lavished their abuse upon Napoleon, and thought courage and prowess were alone required to subdue him, they foresaw that great and well-combined efforts would be necessary for our own safety. Their object was, to show that victory could never be obtained but by a series of decided operations. It was weakness and imbecility which met with their constant and unqualified reprobation. They never condemned any well-directed effort of England against the common

foe. To adopt their own language, "while the pretended advocates of vigour vapoured on the sugar colonies, or punctured detached and remote parts of the French empire, *they* predicted the success of larger and more daring enterprises, with a confidence which could only be justified by a belief almost instinctive in the virtue and fortune of the British arms." Those who have read their strictures on the conduct of the war, in the early numbers of the work, cannot fail to perceive that, although they did not foresee the extraordinary events which gave a new and unexpected turn to the fortunes of Bonaparte, and determined his fate, yet the most important of their doctrines, and those, too, most loudly abused and perverted, were fully verified.*

They were blamed for recommending a pacificatory policy in 1807 and 1812. If their reasonings upon this delicate and intricate subject be dispassionately examined, no one can doubt their force and applicability to the circumstances of the times, much less question the sincere desire of the writers to maintain, at all hazards, the safety of their country, and to preserve untarnished the lustre of her renown. To the obstacles which impeded the progress of conciliatory measures they were not insensible; and they proved, to the satisfaction of every candid judge, that those difficulties were to be found, as they alleged, "not only in the ambition and hypocrisy of Napoleon, but in the feelings and prejudices of a party in this country," whose interests were advanced by a continuance of hostilities, and who profited by the corruption and spoliation of a war, entered upon rashly, and persisted in with unconquerable obstinacy, and without a wish, on their part, that it should terminate in an honourable and lasting peace.

From the commencement of the mighty contest in which all Europe was at length involved, the Edinburgh Review uniformly and earnestly advised a union of all the other great European powers against France, as the only effectual means of reducing her to submission. In an able article, written after the battle of Waterloo, it is remarked, in reference to the sentiments and professions previously avowed in the Review, that "it was playing the game of the enemy, and casting away the last hope of the world, to excite one or two nations to the contest, till the co-operation of the rest could be secured. The fate of all former campaigns, and the fate of the last, have equally illustrated this observation. France rose more audaciously triumphant from the result of all these minor coalitions, and she fell before the first impulse of that great one which we had always recommended. Europe sunk into deeper despondency and humiliation from the impotent and premature attempts which we had ventured to deprecate; and she was re-

* Reference is made to these articles, in a note to the last Essay in this work, under the head of "Foreign Politics." See also Edinburgh Review, vol. x. p. 1.; and vol. xx. p. 213.

stored at once by that united effort, from which alone we had always said that her salvation was to be expected.

" Our other leading doctrine was, that there was but little hope of an effectual resistance to France till the body of the people, in the different nations of Europe, could be made to take part heartily with their governments in the cause; — and here, too, the event has corresponded with our prediction. The greater part of the late wars against France were undertaken by the respective courts who were engaged in them, without any regard to the disposition of their people, who were long indifferent, and in many instances disaffected, to the cause. Their success, accordingly, was such as might have been expected. But after repeated shocks of national misfortune had thrown the sovereigns more entirely on the attachment of their people, and especially after these people had successively tasted of the bitterness of French dominion, and learned by experience the miserable fate that awaited the victims of such a foe, the war assumed a different complexion, and was waged with a different spirit; — campaigns became obstinate, and supplies inexhaustible. The ardour of the troops encouraged their leaders to be enterprising; and it soon appeared that thrones might be overturned, while nations remained unconquered.

" These, we think, were the chief of our heresies; and we really cannot perceive that the events of the last six months should bring shame to their supporters; and least of all in a country where the war against France has always been successful, precisely because it has been the war of the people, and because the people were free."*

Another charge brought against the conductors of the Edinburgh Review was, that the overthrow of Bonaparte gave them no real satisfaction, and that the tenour of their writings, in reference to that wonderful man, was to inculcate the expediency of a passive submission to his domination. So far from this being the fact, abundant extracts might be taken, from various articles, written for the express purpose of recording their admiration of the honourable distinction to which England attained by her successful resistance to the despotism of an able and ambitious soldier. Her courage, ardour, and indomitable energy were the theme of their warmest praise; but they condemned the errors committed in the conduct of the war, and exposed the mistaken policy of the government, by which the resources of the nation were lavished, and her blood spilled, in the prosecution of expeditions which crippled her power, impaired her strength, and tarnished her laurels. With regard to their fallibility as political prophets, it is certainly not a matter for severe reprehension that they did not foresee that Bonaparte would march an army into the heart of Russia, as if in defiance of the elements; and had it not been for his unaccountable infatuation in this instance, he might have remained till his death Emperor of

* See Vol. III. p. 325. of this work.

France, in defiance of the combined efforts of the crowned heads of Europe.

On a calm retrospect of all that has been written in the Edinburgh Review concerning the character and designs of Napoleon, an unprejudiced judge will acquit it of an improper leaning in his favour. It execrated those excesses of arbitrary power which proved his hostility to political liberty and human happiness; but, in his adversity, when his "unprincipled aggressions drove him into that league which rolled back the tide of ruin on himself, and ultimately hurled him into the insignificance from which he originally sprung," it did not insult him by personal indignities and slanders; it did not attempt to tarnish his renown by the most atrocious calumnies; it did not depreciate his talents and genius. Over his downfall it rejoiced, as a catastrophe favourable, in its probable results, to the cause of freedom. His detention and solitary confinement it defended, as indispensable to the tranquillity of Europe; but it did not trample on the reverence due to a stupendous intellect, even when prostituted to objects of personal ambition, by recommending a system of petty annoyance, which, whilst it added to the bitterness of the prisoner's exile, reflected lasting disgrace upon its abettors and defenders.

The political speculations of the Edinburgh Review with respect to Spain have been the subject of sarcasm without point, and of abuse without justice. In the first place, it is totally false, that the efforts of that country against its oppressors were commented upon, in that journal, with a feeling of coldness and reluctance. That the power of the Spaniards to liberate themselves, without assistance from other countries, was doubted; and that there were many circumstances in their character and condition unfavourable to their final triumph, have been proved by the testimony of many engaged in the contest, whose veracity none will venture to impeach. What then was the great error of the Edinburgh Reviewers? They affirmed that "no country ever did so little for itself under circumstances of such excitement and encouragement. It has been liberated," say they, "entirely by British valour and British enterprise; and though its liberation, by any means, is a worthy subject of joy and exultation, it is impossible to reflect, without regret, that a population of more than twelve millions of brave, zealous, and idle persons, has been found so unavailable for its own defence, that it cannot be trusted even to bar the return of its baffled and vanquished invaders whom our arms have expelled. Had it not been for this unfortunate, and, to us, unaccountable inefficiency of the Spanish force, the army of Lord Wellington might long ere this have joined the Allies in front of Paris, and shared the honours of a contest that would then have been both less sanguinary and less doubtful. We have no doubt of the hatred which the Spaniards bear to the French, nor of their individual bravery; and agree with all the world, in admiring the heroic defence which was made by two

of their towns against the fearful force of their besiegers; but it cannot be disguised, that, as a nation, they have made no efforts at all answerable to the occasion that called for them: and though Spain has been the theatre of great and glorious exploits against the common foe, the Spaniards have, in general, been found in the place, not of actors, but spectators." *

To the correctness of these opinions, though they were unpopular when first promulgated, and brought discredit upon their advocates, the most conclusive testimony has been borne by Colonel Napier and other eye-witnesses of the Spanish campaign, who enjoyed the best opportunities of forming an unbiassed judgment of the events by which it was distinguished, and of the characters of the parties concerned. Whatever doubt, therefore, was expressed as to the result of the struggle in which the Spaniards were engaged, did not arise from an unpatriotic indifference to the cause, but from an intimate knowledge of the internal resources and condition of the country, and the national characteristics of the people. That the course of events did not, in all respects, correspond with the predictions of the Edinburgh Review, is a circumstance ill calculated to excite surprise, much less to provoke anger. Its views on the Spanish question were based upon something more than a superficial acquaintance with the existing circumstances of the country; and the censures pronounced upon them by contemporary writers were not the result of superior information, but of a disposition to vilify the character of a publication, which was as far beyond the reach of their power to injure, as of their capacity to imitate its excellence.

In connection with the measures of the British government growing out of the war, it would not be just to pass over without notice the Essays on the memorable Orders in Council, which, it will be remembered, were issued in 1807. Much prejudice and ignorance prevailed respecting those decrees, until their disastrous effects upon the commerce, and consequently upon the wealth and prosperity, of England were clearly demonstrated by Mr. Brougham, in the House of Commons, and by that portion of the periodical press which supported his views. The conspicuous part which the Edinburgh Reviewers took in this discussion subjected them to the most degrading imputations. The partisans of government aspersed their motives, and accused them of aiding Bonaparte, in conjunction with the rebels of America, in his schemes of universal dominion. The most unworthy means were employed to excite popular clamour against those who foretold the effects of these pernicious enactments. It happened, that their forebodings were realised in the most remarkable manner; and, after an arduous struggle, common sense and sound principles triumphed over the mistaken policy of the ministry. To the energy and information of those who un-

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xxii. p. 453.

dertook to enlighten the public mind on this question, England is deeply indebted.

The abolition of the Orders in Council would not have taken place at the time it did, had not the public voice become too strong for ministers to withstand. The appeals and arguments of the Edinburgh Review had a powerful influence in convincing the public that the interests of the commercial portion of the community would be essentially promoted by the adoption of that salutary measure.

The doctrines promulgated by that journal, on the foreign policy of England, from the settlement of the affairs of Europe in 1814 to the present time, as well as previously to that date, are favourable to the cause of liberal principles, and hostile to all "oppression, whether committed by Napoleon, by the Bourbons, or by the agents of our own government. Liberty has found in it a sincere support, whether invaded by foreign or by English hands; and public crimes have met with an undaunted reprobation, whether perpetrated by the enemy in Spain, Switzerland, Holland, — or by England, on the seas, in the East Indies, in Ireland, or at Copenhagen, — or, worst of all, by her allies in Saxony, in Norway, and in Poland." * That this is not the language of unmerited panegyric, it is only necessary to refer, generally, to the admirable Essays in the Review on the American War, and on the proceedings of the Congress of Vienna, and the designs of the Holy Alliance; on Poland, Norway, Genoa, Saxony, Spain, Portugal, and France, down to the late revolution.

Under the head of "Foreign Politics," a valuable selection of articles of this kind has been made; though the limits of the work were not of sufficient extent to warrant the insertion of all that were entitled to a place from their intrinsic merit. The first article is on the "Copenhagen Expedition." It opens with a brief sketch of the state of affairs on the continent of Europe, at the period when that expedition took place. The question is then discussed, whether it was conformable to the laws of political justice, and whether its necessity could be demonstrated from the existence of immediate and imminent danger. The object of the writer is to prove, that no apprehension of remote and contingent peril was a sufficient apology for such an aggression on a neutral power. The arguments in defence of the measure are examined, and shown to be fallacious.

The second essay is on the "Transference of Norway." It is an argumentative production, strongly condemnatory of that transaction. The facts are first detailed, which convey to the reader an accurate idea of the design and character of the undertaking. Cogent reasons are adduced to show that England was not bound to wage war with Norway. This point having been elucidated, a statement is brought forward of the relations sub-

* See Edinburgh Review, vol. xxiv. p. 131.

sisting between Denmark and Norway, for the purpose of showing that the "latter was as completely an independent realm as Denmark or Sweden itself, and could in no respect be considered as a province of the Danish crown." The question is then tried on the ground of authority and precedent. Grotius and Vattel are quoted in defence of the principles laid down by the author, who contends, that precedents could not justify the act, any more than they could the African slave trade or the partition of Poland. The inconsistencies in the reasonings of those who advocated the act of transference are exposed in a felicitous vein of irony; and their favourite argument, that the incorporation with Sweden was advantageous to Norway, is ridiculed as a flimsy sophism. Facts are produced to prove the falsehood of that statement, and to establish the position, that the union was not calculated to improve the condition of the Norwegians. The writer remarks, that it was under "similar pretences the most detestable of crimes, ever perpetrated by a government, were begun and concluded; as, for example, the Partition of Poland; and when France purchased from Genoa the island of Corsica, in 1768; and, lastly, the African Slave Trade," which, it is well known, was defended on the hollow pretext, that it was an act of mercy and humanity to expatriate the negroes from their own *barbarous* country, and put them under the *civilised* yoke of British West Indians. This disquisition concludes with a summary of the evils resulting from the act of transference, amongst which the most prominent is the tendency it had (in the words of the Reviewer) "to shake to the very foundations the wholesome principle so happily inculcated by England, that she was the protector of national independence, and the enemy of unjust aggression all over the world."

The second war with America forms the subject of several profound discussions in the Edinburgh Review. Two articles on this question have been assigned to the division of "Foreign Politics." The first is devoted to a minute investigation into the disputes which led to hostilities with that great and prosperous nation. The writer displays an accurate knowledge of the principles of international law, and accurately lays down the rights of blockade. The orders in council of 1807 are proved to be indefensible, even on the principle of retaliation; and a learned enquiry is instituted into their legality. The essay is replete with valuable information, and the highest authorities are cited in support of the author's views. This Essay should be perused by all who are desirous of obtaining a correct knowledge of the origin of the American war, and the grounds upon which it is usually justified.

There is no topic on which the Edinburgh Reviewers have expatiated with more spirit and energy than the sufferings of Poland. From the commencement of their labours to the present time, the treatment to which that ill-fated nation has been doomed by her oppressors, called forth their sympathy, and elicited many appeals

to the justice and honour of England. The article under consideration is entitled an "Appeal to the Poles," and is written with all the fire and patriotic enthusiasm which the subject is calculated to inspire. The causes are investigated to which may be ascribed the apathy of Englishmen with regard to the persecutions of the Poles. The line of policy is pointed out which the Allies should have pursued in 1814, in their arrangements for the distribution of territory; and the restoration of Polish independence is shown to be one of the first meaures that should have occupied their attention. Various objections are answered to the general argument, why some decisive means should have been adopted in behalf of the most injured nation in Europe. The Allied Sovereigns were called upon to re-establish the independence of Europe upon a lasting foundation. "This is only to be accomplished," says the writer of the article, "by recurring to those principles which, in former times, secured national independence, and made the neighbourhood of the greatest state safe to the most insignificant; which consist in the universal persuasion among statesmen, constantly in view and acted on, that every aggression by one power affects all; and that not an acre of territory may be taken with impunity from any memoer of the European Commonwealth." Many conclusive reasons are urged why Poland should have been treated, at the period alluded to, in accordance with the principles of national justice and honour. Her constitution and government, after the partition in 1772, are graphically delineated; and an affecting detail is given of the cruelties perpetrated by the Russians upon the bravest of her sons. The advantages are there stated which would have resulted to the Allied Powers, in a commercial point of view, from giving freedom to the Poles. Those who wish to see a comprehensive and accurate view of the Polish Question, in all its bearings, should read this eloquent dissertation. It is, perhaps, the most vivid picture ever drawn of the wrongs and miseries of that heroic people. It may also be referred to as a gratifying instance of the zeal and enthusiasm which the Edinburgh Review has invariably evinced when vindicating the rights of nations, and the best interests of humanity. The generous spirit by which the writer was animated is visible in the observation with which he concludes his strictures:—"We belong not to the number of those, who can feel no indignation at injustice, unless committed by our enemies; nor pity for public misfortunes, unless suffered by Africans or Spaniards. But the interests of the Polish people, however important, are only a subordinate part of the present question. The restoration of European independence is the object of every statesman's anxious hopes; the revival of sound and consistent principle alone can effect it; and this cannot be thought possible, by any reflecting mind, without the complete re-establishment of Poland as an independent state."

The discussion of the American war is resumed in the fifth article under the present head. Its purpose is to enforce the necessity and expediency of terminating the hostilities which then existed between England and America. It was written in 1814, a period when the question of entering into negotiations of a pacificatory nature with the government of that country excited considerable interest, and produced a great diversity of opinion. The introduction to this essay is designed to trace to their original source those rancorous feelings which a large portion of the inhabitants of both nations seem desirous to cherish. The first war, which led to the separation of the two countries, is assigned as one cause of the jealousies and antipathies existing on both sides; but the writer adopts the opinion that the Americans were more excusable in allowing hostile feelings to survive the contest than the English. The British orders in council are adduced as another natural reason for the animosity felt by our transatlantic brethren. It is shown that those obnoxious laws were the immediate cause of the war; and that peace would have been preserved if they had never been enacted, or been rescinded at an earlier period. Of several other grounds of dissension, that of impressing American seamen is specified as of sufficient magnitude to justify a resistance to the abuses of which it was productive. The right to reclaim the services and secure the persons of British sailors found in American vessels is admitted; but it is, at the same time, contended, that proper means were not employed to guard against the annoyances to which such a practice is liable. The advantages claimed by the English government of a territorial kind, arising out of the war, are lucidly explained, and the justice of the demands unequivocally denied. The writer proceeds to establish, by a powerful train of argument, the position, that although it could be proved those claims were founded on the principles of justice, it would not be expedient to continue hostilities for the acquisition of such an object; that the chance of success was at least doubtful; and that disgrace and disaster would be the inevitable result of persevering in a contest against the most powerful obstacles. Supposing the object attained, it is next considered what would be the compensation to Great Britain for the blood and treasure by which she had purchased her victory. A vivid picture is here drawn of the consequences that would accrue from her success, — in increasing the hostility of the Americans, in rendering insecure our Canadian colonies, in creating a feeling favourable to America among the different European powers; and, lastly, in augmenting to an inconceivable extent the financial burdens of England, and, consequently, adding to the discontents of the people. The article is composed in a nervous and impressive style; every point is ably elucidated; and the reasoning, throughout, is clear and convincing. One passage may be quoted, as it embodies those liberal and sound opinions, with regard to the policy that England should pursue

towards America, which the Edinburgh Review has at all times supported: — "Within no very great distance of time, America will be one of the most powerful and important nations of the earth; and her friendship and commerce will be more valued, and of greater consequence, in all probability, than that of any one European state. England had — we even think that she still has — great and peculiar advantages for securing to herself this friendship and this commerce. A common origin, a common language, a common law, a common enjoyment of freedom, — all seem to point them out to each other as natural friends and allies. What, then, shall we say of that short-sighted and fatal policy, that, for such an object as we have been endeavouring to expose, should sow the seeds of incurable hostility between two such countries, put rancour in the vessel of their peace, and fix in the deep foundations and venerable archives of their history, to which for centuries their eyes will be reverted, the monuments of English enmity and American valour, on the same conspicuous tablet; binding up together the sentiments of hate to England and love to America, as counterparts of the same patriotic feeling, and mingling in indissoluble association the memory of all that is odious in our history with all that is glorious in theirs?"

The three succeeding articles refer to France; and, even at this distance of time, will, no doubt, be read with interest. The introductory one, on the state of Europe, appeared immediately after the downfall of Bonaparte, and excited no ordinary sensation. It will be observed, that some of the anticipations it contains have not been realised; but, upon the whole, the sentiments and composition of the essay are worthy of the supposed author. In some of the most spirited passages the reader will find a decisive refutation of the calumnies so industriously circulated against the Edinburgh Review, of being too lenient to the vices of Napoleon, and secretly indulging a wish that England might be prostrated at his feet. His character is drawn with fidelity and power; and the grounds upon which it was fitting the world should rejoice at his downfall are stated without exaggeration or undue severity. Ample justice is done to the magnanimous conduct of the Allied Powers; and to the English ministry the praise is awarded of having conducted the most difficult negotiations with prudence and moderation. In the discussion of the question, whether the "restoration of the Bourbons was the best possible issue of the long struggle that preceded it," there is much ingenuity, though subsequent occurrences have proved that some of the speculations were founded upon too favourable an opinion of their character. There is one part of the writer's prophecies, however, which has, happily for France, been completely fulfilled. "With temper and circumspection, they may in time establish the solid foundations of a splendid, though limited, throne: if they aspire again to be *absolute, they will soon cease to reign.*" The reflections on the government of Napoleon, — on the

state of parties in France, — on the probable consequences of giving her a free constitution, — on the influence her possession of rational liberty would exercise upon the destinies of Europe in general, — on the grand moral to be derived from the French Revolution, and the long and bloody contest to which it gave rise, — display a comprehensive knowledge of the events which agitated Europe for a period of twenty years, and a sagacious delineation of the principal characters who occupied a place in that terrible though instructive drama which terminated on the plains of Waterloo. The immediate consequences to England from the peace are described with a masterly hand; and will, at present, be perused with a more lively curiosity, since the predictions of the author have been in every instance verified. This brilliant dissertation very appropriately closes with an eloquent appeal to the justice and magnanimity of the Allied Powers on behalf of the Poles. In justice to the Edinburgh Review, which has been the consistent advocate of that brave people through every varying change of political fortune, the subjoined passage is quoted. Its applicability to recent events is too obvious to be pointed out: — "While Poland remains oppressed and discontented, the peace of Europe will always be at the mercy of any intriguing or ambitious power that may think fit to rouse its vast and warlike population with the vain promise of independence; while it is perfectly manifest that those, by whom alone that promise could be effectually kept, would gain prodigiously, both in security and in substantial influence, by its faithful performance. It is not, however, for mere independence, nor for the lost glories of an ancient and honourable existence, that the people of Poland are thus eager to array themselves in any desperate strife of which this may be proclaimed as the prize. We have shown the substantial and intolerable evils which the extinction of the national dignity — the sore and unmerited wound to their national pride — has necessarily occasioned; and thinking, as we do, that a people without the feelings of national pride, and public duty, must be a people without energy and without enjoyments, we apprehend it to be at any rate indisputable, in the present instance, that the circumstances which have dissolved their political being have struck also at the root of their individual happiness and prosperity; and that it is not merely the unjust destruction of one ancient kingdom that we lament, but the condemnation of fifteen millions of human beings to unprofitable and unparalleled misery. But though these are the considerations by which we are most naturally affected, it should never be forgotten, that all the principles on which the just fabric of national independence confessedly rests in Europe, are involved in the decision of this question; and that no one nation can be secure in its separate existence, if all the rest do not concur in disavowing the maxims which were acted upon in the partition of Poland. It is not only mournful to see the scattered and bleeding members of that unhappy state still palpitating and agonising on the spot where

it lately stood erect in youthful vigour and beauty, but it is unsafe to breathe the noxious vapours which this melancholy spectacle exhales. The wholesome neighbourhood is poisoned by their diffusion; and every independence within their range sickens and is endangered by the contagion."

The next important article that appeared in the Edinburgh Review, on the affairs of France, was published on the announcement of the extraordinary intelligence, that Bonaparte had escaped from Elba and arrived at Paris. It is remarkable for strength of thought, vigour of style, and overpowering invective. It comprises some acute remarks on the Treaty of Paris, on the Congress of Vienna, and on the causes which produced so sudden a change in the opinion of the army as well as of the people, subsequently to the abdication of Napoleon. An able analysis is given of the causes which produced his restoration. Evidence of the most convincing kind is brought forward to prove, that the most important of those causes were referrible to the "condition and character of the French people, — to the administration of the French government, — to the example of other restored governments, — to the state of the French army, — and to the policy of the Congress of Vienna, which is designated as the most powerful agent in subverting the throne of the Bourbons." The extensive division of landed property in France, — the character of Bonaparte's nobility, — the various political parties which existed during the progress of the Revolution, — the principles of the Marquis de la Fayette, and of Benjamin Constant, — the effects of the conscription in making the government of Napoleon detested by the great majority of the French people, — the impressive lesson inculcated upon all nations by the example of the French Revolution, — and the imbecile policy of Louis XVIII. after his restoration — furnish matter for many profound observations, and enable the writer to display the wide range of his knowledge, and the depth of his political views. This essay may be justly regarded as a model of political writing.

A few months after it, appeared another article on the "State of Public Feeling in France after the First and Second Restoration of the Bourbons." It contains a sketch of the government of Louis XVIII. during that interesting period, and of those acts, sanctioned by his authority, which occasioned the general and deep-rooted discontent of his people. The conduct of some of the members of the King's family is condemned, and their designs against the liberties of France exposed. The concluding part of the article is devoted to a discussion of the question, — what ought to be the conduct of England in the event of another change in the dynasty of France? In accordance with the principles so frequently maintained in the Edinburgh Review, the writer advocates the doctrine of neutrality; and contends that although there are obvious limits to the principle of non-interference, yet, any hostile step on the part of the British government for the purpose of keeping Louis on the throne,

or of opposing the pretensions of any competitor whom the voice of the nation might call to supply his place, would be a gross violation of the principles of justice, and a manifest departure from that system of policy which it would be equally the interest and the duty of England to adopt. The reasonings on this interesting topic, and on the course France was called upon to pursue, in the circumstances in which she was then placed, are cogent and persuasive, and may be perused with satisfaction even by those opposed to the opinions which it is the object of the essay to uphold.

The "Aggressions of France against Spain," in 1821, form the subject of the next article. The introductory paragraph expresses concisely the purpose for which it was written; viz., "to give a short statement of such facts and arguments as would enable the public to estimate the justice of the threatened interference of the French government with the internal affairs of the Spanish nation; the consistency of the principles held by the Ultra-Royalists with the general law of nations, or even with any exception from those rules which has been acted on without universal reprobation in civilised times; the influence of the success of such a war on the independence of states, and the circumstances which would render that success more formidable to the security of Great Britain than to that of any other state." These important subjects are discussed with eminent talent; and, it will be seen, that the conclusion to which the author comes, after having considered the question in all its bearings, is, that it was the imperative duty of England, at all hazards and sacrifices, to assume an attitude of hostility, and to fight nobly and resolutely against those detestable principles avowed by France, and which threatened to "extirpate all liberal institutions from the consecrated soil of Europe."

It will not be necessary to give an outline of the next article, on the "Policy and future Fate of Arbitrary Governments." It is an elaborate review of the policy adopted by the different governments of Europe for some time after the general peace, and of the results to which it was likely to lead.

It has been intimated, in another part of this Dissertation, that the Holy Alliance found an implacable assailant in the Edinburgh Review. Several articles were written by its leading contributors to expose the designs of that jesuitical confederacy. That which has been selected for this work contains an exposition of the objects and principles of the Continental governments associated under the title of the Holy Alliance, and of the means by which they sought to accomplish their views. This essay may be read with advantage in connection with the preceding one. The sum of the doctrines supported in that article, as well as the present, is, that "knowledge is indestructible; that liberty is inseparable from knowledge; and that all the interests which support the cause of tyranny must wear away, whilst those which point to freedom must increase in the progress of civilisation."

The last article allotted to the department of Foreign Politics is on the "French Revolution of 1830." It opens with a spirited narrative of the causes which led to that great event. It details the proceedings of the Polignac Ministry, from its formation to the period when those oppressive measures were adopted which terminated in a patriotic resistance on the part of the people. The determined conduct of the French Opposition in the Chambers, — the promptitude and decision of the French after the passing of the obnoxious ordinances, — the bravery and union of the citizens in battle, and their dignified moderation in victory, — are described in a masterly style. The position which the English would probably have assumed, had the same arbitrary encroachments been attempted by their rulers, is commented on in a tone of cutting sarcasm. The observations on the necessity of placing the elective franchise in France upon a more extended basis, on arming the executive with sufficient power to give effect to its own functions, on the important subject of the Nobility, and on the constitution of the National Guard, are entitled to attention. Of the part which England sustained during the contest, and of the reception given to Charles X., the author speaks in no very complimentary terms. Of the consequences of the revolution, and its effects in advancing the progress of liberty throughout Europe, his opinions are in unison with those so conspicuously manifested in the contributions of other writers in the Edinburgh Review. None but an honest champion of truth and justice would have written the following declaration: — "The emancipation of France is the hope and strength of freemen all over Europe. Had she succumbed, the chance of liberty in Italy, in Spain, in Portugal, was indefinitely postponed; in England herself, a sight of much evil omen was held out to both rulers and people. The most imbecile of ministers, and the least trusted by their country, are ever ready to retreat behind the ranks of the army; ever prepared to support their power by force. But no reflecting man can now entertain a doubt, that if our rulers, untaught by the recent lessons, should ever attempt to enforce arbitrary acts by arms, the people of this country would be ashamed of being outdone by those of France in defending their most sacred liberties."

It has been thought necessary to give a more minute analysis of the views and reasonings contained in the articles on Foreign Politics, than will be required of those upon other subjects which have yet to be noticed. The Editor was desirous of directing the attention of his readers to the opinions of the Edinburgh Review on many of the great questions of foreign policy, which have given so deep an interest to the history of Europe from the period of the French Revolution. He is aware that those opinions have been intentionally misrepresented; and he was, therefore, the more anxious to assign them a prominent place, both in his selections and his commentary.

Under the designation of "General Politics" have been in-

serted articles on "Reform in Parliament;" "Church Reform;" "Liberty of the Press;" "Ireland;" and "West India Slavery." On the first of these topics four able essays have been selected, written at different periods, and not by the same contributors; though they are all by men of high literary attainments and extensive information. It need not be disguised, that the opinions of the Edinburgh Review on Parliamentary Reform have not been consistent. Of the glaring inequalities and abuses in our late system of representation, it was never the unqualified defender, though it differed essentially from the leading reformers as to the nature of the change that was required, the extent of the advantages which it would produce, and the time at which it should be made. Its writers never denied the necessity of a great and substantial improvement in the mode of electing the House of Commons, nor the right of the people to obtain it by the exercise of every means which the laws of the country placed within their reach. But they were less apprehensive, than some sterner politicians, of the evils resulting from the concession of power to the peerage and the landed interest; and they manifested a tenderness towards the rotten boroughs almost amounting to an acknowledgment of the benefits attributed to them by those who reaped substantial advantages from their existence. It is but fair, however, to admit, that the Edinburgh Reviewers invariably laid it down as a fundamental principle, that Reform in Parliament, on a broad and efficient plan, ought to be cheerfully granted, when the weight and consequence of the middle and lower classes, increased by a wider diffusion of wealth and intelligence, should produce such a change in the structure of society as should render it safe and expedient to intrust them with a more abundant share of political power. It would not be in accordance with the object of this essay to criticise the schemes in detail, which have been proposed by the Reviewers for the accomplishment of the great measure to which they were pledged from the beginning of their labours. The outline it is intended to give of the articles on that subject will sufficiently explain the grounds upon which they conceived the representative system should undergo an entire change, and the specific plans they recommended for adoption. There is nothing more certain than that, in all extensive innovations on the laws and constitution of a nation, the friends of practical improvement ought not to be unmindful of times and circumstances. Upon every occasion that the Edinburgh Review directed the attention of the public to the question of Reform in Parliament, this wise precaution was observed. The principle was strenuously upheld, that whenever the voice of the nation called loudly and unanimously for the settlement of that vital question, it should no longer be withheld, and that the magnitude of the concession should be commensurate with the "new power and energy generated in the nation, for the due application of which there was no

contrivance in the original plan of the constitution." In the following passage, this view of the matter is developed in language that cannot be misunderstood: — "If the people have risen into greater consequence, let them have greater power. If a greater proportion of our population be now capable and desirous of exercising the functions of free citizens, let a greater number be admitted to the exercise of those functions. If the quantity of mind and of will, that must now be represented in our legislature, be prodigiously increased since the frame of that legislature was adjusted, let its basis be widened, so as to rest on all that intellect and will. If there be a new power and energy generated in the nation, for the due application of which there is no contrivance in the original plan of the constitution, let it flow into those channels through which all similar powers were ordained to act by the principles of that plan. The power itself you can neither repress nor annihilate; and, if it be not assimilated to the system of the constitution, you seem to be aware that it will overwhelm and destroy it. To set up against it the power of influence and corruption, is to set up that by which its strength is recruited, and its safe application rendered infinitely more difficult: it is to defend your establishments, by loading them with a weight which of itself makes them totter under its pressure, and, at the same time, affords a safe and inviting approach to its assailant." *

Having made those explanatory remarks, which the principles of the Review on Parliamentary Reform will, it is hoped, fully justify, it now remains to give a rapid notice of the four articles transferred to this work on that great question. The first professes to be a Review of the Right Honourable William Windham's Speech in the House of Commons, in 1809, on Mr. Curwen's bill for better securing the independence and purity of Parliament, by preventing the procuring or obtaining of seats by corrupt practices. After eulogising Mr. Windham's intellectual accomplishments, the writer details the origin, progress, and destiny of Mr. Curwen's Bill, upon which he makes some very keen strictures. He then proceeds to examine the arguments of Mr. Windham against Parliamentary Reform, and in defence of the sale of public trusts, and other instruments of corruption. The conclusion to which he comes is, that a traffic in seats, under any circumstances, is fraught with manifold evils; that no pretext, however plausible, can justify the "abuses of throwing the nomination seats into the hands of borough patrons; and that the most beneficial and important of all reforms would be that which would prevent the exercise of this power." On the question as to the influence of property in elections, much ingenuity is displayed in drawing the line of demarcation between its natural and its corrupt or artificial influence. Any attempt to interdict the former is characterised as absurd and unjust; whilst the latter is condemned, and means suggested for its repression. Of the practical

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xvii. p. 383.

consequences resulting to the nation from the various species of boroughmongering, a description is given which exhibits, in striking colours, the revolting deformities of the old system of representation. The commonplace fallacy, of the danger that might result to our constitution from a correction of these abuses, is very happily exposed; and a series of arguments are employed to prove, that the infamy and danger of parliamentary corruption consists in the "weakening and depravation of that public principle, and general concern for right and liberty, upon which all political freedom must ultimately depend: and the real increase of the power of the crown, by the means which this organised system of abuse affords for bringing the whole weight of its enormous patronage to bear upon the body of the legislature." The remedies proposed for these glaring evils are, to lessen the pressure of that influence by an exclusion of placemen and minor officers of the government from parliament,—to abolish all sinecure offices, and to enforce a system of rigorous economy, — to multiply the numbers and raise the qualifications of voters, by taking away the right of election from decayed, inconsiderable, and rotten boroughs, and bestowing it on great towns of commercial wealth and distinction. These leading principles having been briefly touched upon, the author refutes, with admirable tact and ability, an argument of which the enemies of Reform dexterously avail themselves as a plea against all attempts at innovation, viz., that "although the influence of the crown has increased very greatly within the last fifty years, yet it has not kept pace with the general increase which has taken place, in the same period, in the wealth, weight, and influence of the people; so that, in point of fact, the power of the crown, although absolutely greater, is proportionally less, than it was at the commencement of the reign of George III.; and ought to be augmented rather than diminished, if our object be to preserve the ancient balance of the constitution." To expose this fallacy, the causes are investigated which have produced an augmentation in the intellectual and moral power of the people. The supposition is ridiculed, that it can be checked or weakened by perpetuating a system of corruption and abuse. A Reform in Parliament, adapted to the change in the structure of society, is urgently recommended as a safe and effectual means of rectifying the grievances, removing the discontents, and restraining the excesses of the nation. One passage may, with propriety, be added to the imperfect outline now attempted of this able disquisition: — "The people are grown strong in intellect, resolution, and mutual reliance, — quick in the detection of the abuses by which they are wronged, and confident in the powers by which they may be compelled ultimately to seek their redress. Against this strength, it is something more wild than madness, and more contemptible than folly, to think of arraying an additional phalanx of abuses, and drawing out a wider range of corruptions. In that contest, the issue cannot be doubtful, nor the conflict long; and,

deplorable as the victory will be, which is gained over order, as well as over guilt, the blame will rest heaviest upon those whose offences first provoked, what may probably turn out a sanguinary and unjustifiable vengeance." It is upwards of twenty years since this powerful passage was written; and, fortunately for the peace and tranquillity of society, and the security of the throne itself, the nation has been at length delivered from the appalling dangers which the writer so eloquently depicts, by the firmness of the King, the integrity of his ministry, and, above all, by the union, energy, and unconquerable resolution of the people.

The important question of Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage is discussed in the second article on Parliamentary Reform. That they are not the ancient right of the people of England, was proved by historical evidence in an essay, in the Review, not inserted in this work.* But in the present article the subject is investigated on the principle of utility, and it is demonstrated that universal suffrage would be injurious to the liberties of the community. To establish this position, an enquiry is made into the mode of representation best calculated to secure the freedom and happiness of a nation circumstanced like Great Britain. The author conceives that a system of representation by classes is the most likely to effect that object. The following passage embodies the fundamental principle of the theory, in the developement of which a great deal of ingenuity and acuteness is exhibited:—"To understand the principles of the composition of a representative assembly thoroughly, we must divide the people into classes, and examine the variety of local and professional interests of which the general interest is composed. Each of these classes must be represented by persons who will guard its peculiar interest, whether that interest arises from inhabiting the same district, or pursuing the same occupation, — such as traffic or husbandry, or the useful or ornamental arts. The fidelity and zeal of such representatives are to be secured by every provision which, to a sense of common interest, superadd a fellow-feeling with their constituents."

Having unfolded, at considerable length, the merits and advantages of his favourite plan, he draws an estimate of the influence of popular elections on the character of the different classes of the community; first, on the English nobility, and, secondly, on the humbler orders. He then proves that a variety of rights of suffrage should be preferred to any uniform system, and that all interests are better protected when the representatives are chosen by considerable portions only of all classes, than by all men. In support of this view of the subject, he enters into a variety of details, the object of which is to point out the injurious consequences which would flow from the adoption of universal suffrage. Several plans of reform

* Vol. xxviii. p. 126.

are canvassed; among others, that of Mr. Horne Tooke, which the Reviewer denominates "an ingenious stratagem for augmenting the power of wealth, under pretence of bestowing suffrage almost universally." Of vote by ballot he avows himself a decided opponent, and for the following reasons:—"That it would not produce secrecy; that if secrecy of suffrage could be really adopted, it would, in practice, contract, instead of extending, the elective franchise, by abating, if not extinguishing, the strongest inducements to its exercise; and that, if secret suffrage were to be permanently practised by all voters, it would deprive election of all its popular qualities, and of many of its beneficial effects." This valuable essay closes with some remarks on the operation of universal suffrage and ballot in America, which are worthy of particular attention. The authorship has been ascribed to the late Sir James Mackintosh.

The object of the next article is to explain and defend a scheme of Moderate Reform, which would "provide for a real and considerable increase of the direct power of the body of the people, in the Commons' House of Parliament; furnish a reasonable security that it will not be the source of new dangers to the other institutions and establishments of the kingdom; be founded, not only on general reasons of political expediency, but in the acknowledged principles, and, as far as may be, in the established and even technical forms, of the British constitution; and on such constitutional principles as present a distinct and visible limit to its operation; so as to lead by no necessary consequence to the adoption of other measures, and to leave all future questions of that nature to be discussed on their own intrinsic merits; and, lastly, as a consequence of the previous conditions, be so cautiously framed, that an administration friendly to Reform, but invariably attached to the Constitution, could propose and carry it." The limited plan of Lord John Russell, as developed in his speech in the House of Commons, in 1819, is characterised as embracing the foundations of such a Reform. The Reviewer is of the opinion that it should comprise an immediate addition of twenty members to the House of Commons, to be chosen by opulent and populous towns not previously represented. The accordance of this proposition with the principles of the constitution, is demonstrated by historical evidence, taken from the annals of the House of Commons. The safety of the proposed Reform forms the next topic of discussion; and the objections to it, made by one party, as unnecessary, and by another, as inadequate, are satisfactorily answered. The second part of the plan relates to the adoption of effectual measures for the disfranchisement of delinquent boroughs, which is defended on the grounds of constitutional law, as well as of political expediency and precedent. The means for effecting this are stated; and the transfer of forfeited franchises to populous communities, of 15,000 or upwards, is preferred, as being the most convenient means of widening the basis of representation. The third head

comprehends an account of the representation of Scotland, with suggestions for its improvement. An arrangement is proposed, by which the expenses of elections in England, both in counties and towns, would be materially lessened. On the expediency of shortening the duration of parliaments, the writer expresses some doubts; but, when the expenses of elections are reduced, and the elective franchise more widely diffused, he considers that the repeal of the Septennial Act would be fraught with salutary effects. He replies very pointedly to Mr. Canning's question, "At what period of history was the House of Commons in the state to which the Reformers wish to restore it?" and finishes his able dissertation with the following remarks: — "If no conciliatory measures on this subject be adopted, there is great reason to apprehend that the country will be reduced to the necessity of choosing between different forms of despotism. For it is certain, that the habit of maintaining the forms of the constitution, by a long system of coercion and terror, must convert it into an absolute monarchy. It is equally evident, from history and experience, that revolutions effected by violence, and attended by a total change in the fundamental laws of a commonwealth, have a natural tendency to throw power into the hands of their leaders, which, however disguised, must, in truth, be unlimited and dictatorial. The restraints of law and usage necessarily cease. The factions among the partisans of the revolution, and the animosity of those whom it has degraded or despoiled, can seldom be curbed by a gentler hand than that of absolute power; and there is no situation of human affairs, in which there are stronger temptations to those arbitrary measures, of which the habit alike unfits rulers and nations from performing their parts in the system of liberty."

The defects and anomalies in the Scottish system of representation form the subject of the last article under the head of Reform in Parliament. It was written some time previous to the introduction of the Scotch Reform Bill, lately passed. The plan of elections in the counties and towns, under the old law, is first detailed; and it is then examined with reference to its effects on the electors, the representatives, and the people. The objections usually offered by the anti-reform party to any innovation upon the established system are shown to be untenable. They are comprised in the subjoined enumeration: —"That a change would violate the articles of the Union; that the thing works well, in spite of all theoretical defects; that the scheme of representation is not to be viewed by itself, but must be taken along with the general representation of the country, which, upon the whole, is fair enough; and the Scotch, though not protected by their own members, are by others: that popular elections would lead to those scenes of tumult and violence by which the peace of England is sometimes disturbed; that the vested rights of existing electors would be invaded by any alteration; and that the people are satisfied with the state of things as

they are." The remedy for existing evils and abuses, in the opinion of the Reviewer, should consist in an extension of the franchise in counties, and in the adoption of a qualification which "should have the effect of admitting the intelligence of the middle ranks of society, and of the upper part of the lower rank." A scheme rather different in its nature is proposed for the royal burghs and large towns. On the advantages which would result from these reforms the writer expresses opinions of the most decided character; and exhorts the people of Scotland to be united and energetic in a constitutional struggle for their rights.

The reader will find in the foregoing articles on Parliamentary Reform a full and impartial exposition of the opinions of the Edinburgh Review on that great question. There is much, no doubt, that admits of a diversity of sentiment; and many enlightened Reformers will conceive that the contributors to that journal have not until very recently advocated such a change in the representative system as the urgency of the circumstances demanded. But it is not true, as their opponents have alleged, that they ever denied the necessity of a great and substantial alteration in the plan of election. Their objections were not to the principle of Reform, but depended chiefly on its extent, on the time, and on the state of public feeling. It is not matter of censure, that they adapted their views to the expression of the popular will, and to that marked revolution in the condition of all classes which rendered a larger measure of concession necessary in 1832 than might have been prudent or practicable twenty years ago. They now support a more extensive Reform than they did in 1804, because they have watched the progress of public opinion, and have found, from the increasing union, intelligence, and consequence of the people, that the policy of the government must be moulded to the necessities and altered character of the age. This is a species of inconsistency of which no man need be ashamed. Had another class of politicians, who boast of their constitutional principles, accommodated themselves with equal flexibility to the advancing spirit of the times, the work of regenerating and restoring the British Constitution would not have been left to a Whig Ministry.

It is clearly shown, in the following extract from an article, written during the Wellington Administration, that the Reviewers foresaw the struggle in which the nation was to be engaged, and the only means by which it could be kept within the bounds of legitimate resistance: —

"A large part of the nation is certainly desirous of a reform in the representative system. How large that part may be, and how strong its desires on the subject may be, it is difficult to say. It is only at intervals that the clamour on the subject is loud and vehement. But it seems to us that, during the remissions, the feeling gathers strength, and that every successive burst is more violent than that which preceded it. The public attention may be for a

time diverted to the Catholic claims or the Mercantile code; but it is probable that, at no very distant period, perhaps in the lifetime of the present generation, all other questions will merge in that which is, in a certain degree, connected with them all.

"Already we seem to ourselves to perceive the signs of unquiet times, the vague presentiment of something great and strange which pervades the community; the restless and turbid hopes of those who have every thing to gain, the dimly-hinted forebodings of those who have every thing to lose. Many indications might be mentioned, in themselves indeed as insignificant as straws; but even the direction of a straw, to borrow the illustration of Bacon, will show from what quarter the hurricane is setting in.

"A great statesman might, by judicious and timely reformations, by reconciling the two great branches of the natural aristocracy, the capitalists and the landowners, by so widening the base of the government as to interest in its defence the whole of the middling class, that brave, honest, and sound-hearted class, which is as anxious for the maintenance of order, and the security of property, as it is hostile to corruption and oppression, succeed in averting a struggle to which no rational friend of liberty or of law can look forward without great apprehensions. There are those who will be contented with nothing but demolition; and there are those who shrink from all repair. There are innovators who long for a President and a National Convention; and there are bigots, who, while cities larger and richer than the capitals of many great kingdoms are calling out for representatives to watch over their interests, select some hackneyed jobber in boroughs, some peer of the narrowest and smallest mind, as the fittest depositary of a forfeited franchise. Between these extremes there lies a more excellent way. Time is bringing round another crisis analogous to that which occurred in the seventeenth century. We stand in a situation similar to that in which our ancestors stood under the reign of James the First. It will soon again be necessary to reform that we may preserve; to save the fundamental principles of the constitution by alterations in the subordinate parts. It will then be possible, as it was possible two hundred years ago, to protect vested rights, to secure every useful institution — every institution endeared by antiquity and noble associations; and, at the same time, to introduce into the system improvements harmonising with the original plan. It remains to be seen whether two hundred years have made us wiser.

"We know of no great revolution which might not have been prevented by compromise early and graciously made. Firmness is a great virtue in public affairs; but it has its proper sphere. Conspiracies and insurrections in which small minorities are engaged, the outbreakings of popular violence unconnected with any extensive project or any durable principle, are best repressed by vigour and decision. To shrink from them is to make them

formidable. But no wise ruler will confound the pervading taint with the slight local irritation. No wise ruler will treat the deeply seated discontents of a great party as he treats the conduct of a mob which destroys mills and power-looms. The neglect of this distinction has been fatal even to governments strong in the power of the sword. The present time is indeed a time of peace and order. But it is at such a time that fools are most thoughtless, and wise men most thoughtful. That the discontents which have agitated the country during the late and the present reign, and which, though not always noisy, are never wholly dormant, will again break forth with aggravated symptoms, is almost as certain as that the tides and seasons will follow their appointed course. But in all movements of the human mind which tend to great revolutions, there is a crisis at which moderate concession may amend, conciliate, and preserve. Happy will it be for England if, at that crisis, her interests be confided to men for whom history has not recorded the long series of human crimes and follies in vain." *

That a journal which has given its honest and unpurchased advocacy to every great measure of political amelioration and religious freedom, should be solicitous to see the enormous abuses of the church establishment of England and Ireland removed by legislative authority, was naturally to be expected. The efforts of the Reviewers were early directed to the means by which the church might be best reformed; but in this, as in all the other changes in our institutions to which they have extended their support, their object has been to amend, not to subvert; to strengthen the edifice by timely and well-considered improvements, not to aim a blow at its existence by rash and violent innovation. The nature and extent of the reformations which they have advocated as being conducive to the stability of the church, will be understood from a brief outline of the contents of the two articles on the subject inserted in this work.

The first is on the "Prodigality and Corruptions of the English and Irish Church Establishments," and appropriately commences with a brief sketch of the hereditary revenue of the crown, and subsequently of parliamentary grants for the augmentation of ecclesiastical emoluments. Amongst these, the First Fruits and Queen Anne's Bounty Fund occupy a conspicuous place. Of the abuses connected with the distribution of these sources of revenue an instructive account is given; and some extraordinary facts are related concerning the evasion of the payment of First Fruits by the clergy in Ireland, which exhibit, in a most striking point of view, the rapacity of the hierarchy of that country, and the shameful prodigality by which the expenditure of church property has

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xlviii. p. 168.

been signalised. The revolting abominations of the system, as it exists there in all its native deformity, are powerfully described. The Reviewer justly remarks, "that the question, whether this establishment should or should not be reformed, is one on which every man, whose opinion carries with it the least influence, should make up his mind; and as to the answer, we, who see constantly before us the effects of a church establishment constructed on rational principles, can feel no sort of doubt. If it be merely intended by the Irish establishment to show how rich and flourishing the few may be where the many are wasting in ignorance and misery, — if it be intended to show, that 850 men may be happy and idle, while millions are labouring for subsistence in vain, the policy pursued towards it may be allowed to be rational and consistent. If the object be to attach the Irish people to the Protestant creed, the idea of stationing among a savage peasantry a number of beneficed clergymen, whose wealth supplies them with every temptation to desert their duty, and of making them raise their incomes by a tax which involves them in perpetual strife with that peasantry, is perfectly grotesque in absurdity. Whatever may be the supposed effects of a richly-endowed church in maintaining a particular creed, it is evident that it is not the machine for the conversion of a people." For the redress of this grievance a plan is proposed for abolishing the tithes, and substituting for them a more equitable and less oppressive mode of paying the clergy.

The second article is on the "Necessity of a thorough Reform in the Church of England." The advantages which society derives from a regularly endowed and resident clergy are admitted, in theory; but the practice is shown to be lamentably deficient. The corruptions which have rendered the establishment so generally unpopular, and even alienated many of its most conscientious members, are forcibly stated, and those reforms indicated which, the writer conceives, would strengthen it without endangering its destruction. The connection of the Church with the Crown and the Aristocracy is assigned as the principal cause of the distrust and growing aversion with which it is regarded by the great majority of the people, — an aversion that has been materially augmented by the infamous system of Church patronage, which gives overgrown wealth to the pampered few, and reduces the industrious majority to the humiliating situation of abject dependants upon the rich, while all are placed beyond the salutary influence of popular control. The exclusive and intolerant spirit by which the National Church has been too frequently characterised, and which is so offensively displayed, in the present day, by many of its clerical supporters, is adduced, by the writer of the article, as another reason why its followers have diminished, and the number of dissenters increased. The defects in its government and external constitution he conceives to be indicative of the misgovernment

that prevailed in the times when they were formed. In illustration of this, he adverts to the manner in which the bishops are appointed, and to their complete independence of the popular voice; — to the injustice of pluralities and dispensations, and to the want of a suitable plan of education fitted for those who wish to become professionally connected with the Church. He exposes the weak and futile objections of its indiscreet champions, who think that the venerable pile should remain untouched by the reforming hand of the legislature; and it is to the "exercise of its moral and virtuous discretion he looks forward with hope for the purification of the Church of England from all those spots and stains which the state, for its own purposes, has thrown upon it, no less than from those which had their origin in its own negligence and ignorance."

The Edinburgh Review has conferred invaluable services on the cause of freedom by its zealous and unwavering support of the liberty of the press. When attacked, in seasons of political excitement, by the government and its law officers, who wished to control the movements of that mighty engine by legal persecution, it found in the conductors of that journal faithful and steady friends. At another period, when a society was formed under the avowed pretence of checking the licentiousness of the press, but with the secret intention of prosecuting every publication opposed to the principles and measures of the existing ministry, they unmasked the designs, and deprecated the tendency of that dangerous combination. In fact, upon every occasion, when attempts were made to restrain free discussion on the acts of public men, by subjecting their assailants to the Libel Laws, the influence of the Review was employed on the side of truth and justice.

Of the numerous articles on that great subject, one of the most valuable has been inserted in this work. It contains a luminous exposition of the most important provisions of the law of England, as now carried into practice, in relation to the press, with an exposure of the mischievous consequences resulting from its operation, and an enquiry into the best means of remedying its defects, and making it more favourable to justice, and to the rights of the people. After explaining the theory of the law of libel, as defined by the most approved writers on jurisprudence, and detailing the three methods of proceeding by which a person guilty of the offence may be put upon trial, the Reviewer enters upon the enquiry whether evidence, as to the truth of the libellous matter, should be excluded. He demonstrates, by a variety of convincing arguments, that the law, in its present form, "is injurious to the interests of liberty and of good government; destroys the best protection which private character can have, and promotes the licentiousness of the press, in the only quarter in which it is to be dreaded, — its inroads upon the comfort of individuals." To render

it more consistent, more congenial with the principles of justice, more effective in the promotion of free discussion, in the punishment of falsehood, and in the protection of private character, he proposes to allow the "truth of the matters contained in any alleged libel to be given in evidence, and to leave this to the jury, among other things, without calling upon them to acquit the defendant because he shall have proved his statements to be true." Several plausible objections to this change are examined, and shown to be of insufficient consequence to counterbalance the many strong reasons for its adoption. Other defects in the law of libel of a technical character are pointed out, and a conclusive reply is given to the arguments in defence of prosecutions by *ex officio* information. The nature of this prerogative, and the dangerous consequences flowing from its exercise, are exhibited by a reference to those periods in the history of the British government, when it was employed to subject the press to odious restrictions, and to shelter official delinquency from detection and punishment. The bill to amend the libel law, introduced into the House of Commons some years since by Mr. Brougham, is described as being in its fundamental principles the same as those so clearly developed in this article. It concludes with obviating an objection which the enemies of innovation might make to any extensive change in the law, on the ground that it would be hazardous to abolish what had been consecrated by long usage, and sanctioned by the most eminent members of the profession. This learned and argumentative essay may be safely recommended to those who wish to obtain an accurate knowledge of the libel law of England, or who require to be convinced of the necessity that exists for its revision and amendment.

The readers of the Edinburgh Review are aware, that no periodical journal has better understood, or pleaded more effectually for the interests of Ireland. At a time when it was almost impossible to rouse the British public to a sympathy in her wrongs, and a candid discussion of her political and religious grievances, she found honest and efficient advocates in a body of writers whose enlightened opinions, incessantly urged and powerfully defended, had at length the effect of awakening a feeling in her behalf, both on the part of the English government and nation. There was not room in the present work for more than one article on Irish affairs. It has been selected from among many others of undoubted excellence, because it embraces an investigation of the leading subjects connected with the causes of Ireland's misery and discontent, and the remedial measures by which alone a suffering and discontented population can be raised from wretchedness to prosperity, from disloyalty to obedience, and from slavery to freedom. On some of the means suggested by the Reviewers for allaying discontents and putting down disturbances, a considerable differ-

ence of opinion will prevail. But it is impossible to conceive that any well-informed and liberal-minded individual should peruse their convincing arguments on Catholic emancipation, — the Irish church establishment and tithes, — the government and the magistracy, — on the state of parties and education, — the grand jury system, — commercial and revenue laws, — emigration, poor laws, and population, — and a number of other subordinate topics, without being impressed with the conviction, that they have been sincere and warm friends of Ireland; that their unshrinking advocacy of her cause, in the worst of times, has done much to enlighten the public mind; and that the principle which they have maintained consistently, is founded upon truth, viz. that the "miseries and atrocities which afflict that unhappy country are not the result of uncontrollable causes, but they all have their origin in, and are, in fact, the natural and necessary consequences of vicious political and civil institutions and misgovernment."

It is the object of the article to which reference has been made, to establish the assertion contained in the above quotation. The enquiry into which the writer enters is divided into two parts; first, it embraces an investigation of the causes to which the political and religious feuds of Ireland may be traced; and, secondly, of the causes from which the poverty and misery of the people have arisen. Under the former head is included Catholic disabilities, a topic which is discussed at considerable length, and with great force of argument. The conclusion to be deduced from the whole is, that "without emancipation in the broadest sense of the term, — without emancipation in law and in fact, — without the abolition of every existing legal disability and the adoption of a system of the most rigid impartiality on the part of government, — it would be worse than absurd to suppose that the spirit of discord should depart from the land, and that the foundations of national wealth and prosperity should be laid."

The next point touched upon is the defective state of the Irish government and the magistracy. A plan of reform is suggested, the necessity for which, and its signal advantages, are impartially argued. The proposition to appoint Lord Lieutenants of the counties of Ireland, which has been recently acted upon by Earl Grey's ministry, is defended on strong and plausible grounds. The disbanding of the yeomanry corps is recommended as a measure absolutely necessary to preserve the tranquillity of the country; and the abolition of the office of lord lieutenant is proposed, as an arrangement fraught with manifold benefits, calculated to improve the character of the administration, and to reconcile the people to the British government. The fertile subject of the church establishment and tithes is next referred to. The combined evils of the two he conceives to be the main sources of contention and party animosity. The substance of the Reviewer's reasoning, in reply to the allegation that tithes are the property of the church, and that

their abolition would be tantamount to an act of public robbery, is embodied in the following extract: — "It might as well be said that the taxes levied for the support of the army are the property of the soldiers, and that any attempt to redeem them would be a violation of the rights of property! Tithes are not the property of the clergy. They are the property of the public, who give them to the clergy as a reward for their services, and who may, consequently, apply them to any other purposes the moment they choose to dispense with their services, or to reduce their wages. An established church is a mere human institution; and can boast of no higher or more respectable origin than a custom-house or a standing army. The clergy stand in exactly the same predicament as any other class of public functionaries. They are the servants of the public, paid for instructing the people in their moral and religious duties; and it is mere drivelling to suppose that government has not a right to regulate their salaries, or to dismiss them altogether. We admit that it would be most unjust to deprive the present incumbents of their revenues; and a full compensation or equivalent ought, therefore, to be given them for whatever they might lose by the adoption of the plan we have recommended.

"But there is no reason, and there can be none, why the tithe system should be made perpetual, — why the public should be made to support the same number of established clergymen in all time to come, and to pay them five or six times the sum that would suffice to procure them the services of an equally learned and pious body of men. No man of ordinary understanding will be induced to believe, that those who support the flagrant and almost inconceivable abuses of the Irish tithe system, do so, lest, in subverting it, they should be invading the right of property! Every one must see that tithes are nothing more than an arbitrary, oppressive, and ruinous tax on the gross produce of the land, exclusively laid out in paying the wages of a particular class of public servants; and although it were neither expedient nor politic to reduce the number of these servants, nor to lower their wages, government would be just as little liable to the charge of injustice, or of invading the rights of property, were they to do so, as they are when they pay off a line-of-battle ship, or reduce the wages of the seamen."

The design of the second branch of the Reviewer's enquiry, is to ascertain the causes of the extreme poverty and destitution of the Irish peasantry. It comprehends the following important topics, upon all of which he evinces a thorough knowledge of the condition of Ireland, and of those practical and active remedies, which would conduce to her physical and moral advantage: — On what the rate of wages depends; the effect which the extraordinary increase in the population has had in augmenting the wretchedness and degradation of the lower classes; the influence of the Bounty Acts in giving a stimulus to population; the pernicious conse-

quences resulting from the minute division of land; the necessity of changing the whole law of Ireland with regard to landlord and tenant; the propriety of introducing an act to prevent the subletting of land, and adopting a system similar to that which exists in Scotland; the necessity of altering the freehold system, and confining the elective franchise to persons in possession of freehold or copyhold property, of the real value of twenty or thirty pounds a year, and to the occupiers of farms paying fifty pounds or upwards of rent; the reasons why the introduction of Poor Laws would complete the ruin of the country; the necessity of an efficient and liberal plan of National Education; the benefits of an effectual reduction in the duties laid on all articles in general demand; and, lastly, the absurdity of every scheme for providing employment for the poor by grants of money, or by the aid of bounties on particular articles. A vast deal of useful information is given on each of these subjects. The remedial measures proposed are discussed in a candid and impartial spirit, and the anticipated effects from their adoption, though they may not correspond with the views of all parties, are brought forward with so much perspicuity of detail, and urged by so many forcible arguments, that it must be quite manifest, even to those who dissent from the author's principles and conclusions, that he is perfectly master of the subject, and sincerely devoted to the interests of Ireland. The concluding passage is written in a prophetic spirit, and expresses sentiments which the Edinburgh Review has never omitted an opportunity of impressing upon the minds of its readers, from its first Number to the present time. "As Englishmen, — as lovers of equal and impartial justice,— we owe reparation to Ireland for the wrongs she has suffered at our hands; and we owe it for our own sakes. It depends entirely on our future conduct, whether Ireland is to be rendered our best friend and ally, or our most dangerous and mortal foe. If we treat her with kindness and affection, — if we redress her wrongs, and open her a path to wealth and prosperity, — the Union will cease to be nominal, and the two countries will be firmly and inseparably united: but if we obstinately persevere in our present system, and cherish all the gross and scandalous abuses which have cast the majority of her people into the depths of poverty and vice, they will certainly endeavour (and who shall blame them?) to wreak their vengeance on the heads of their oppressors; dissension, terror, and civil war will rage with increased fury and violence; and our ascendency will be at an end, the instant it cannot be maintained by force of arms."

In adverting to the Slave Trade, it would be superfluous to pass a laboured eulogium on the honourable part taken by the Edinburgh Review in the discussion of that great question. Though the attention of the public had been directed to the oppressions and sufferings of the African negroes, previously to the commencement of that journal, still it deserves the praise of having kept alive popular

enthusiasm. Those who are acquainted with the history of the Slave controversy must be aware of the long and arduous battle fought by the friends of humanity and justice against the combined influence of government corruption and individual interests. They cannot have forgotten the sneers and reproaches thrown upon the philanthropy and courage of Wilberforce, the sacrifices of Clarkson, the efforts of Sharpe, and the eloquence of Fox and Pitt. They cannot have forgotten the exertions made by the press to hold up to merited contempt the sophisms by which the supporters of slavery attempted to defend that abominable traffic. The Edinburgh Review was one of the most diligent and effective labourers in the good cause. It propagated truths which no evasions, no cunning, no venality could resist,—truths which ultimately sunk deep into the public mind, gave energy and confidence to the champions of freedom, and accelerated that extraordinary change in the general opinion of the nation, by the resistless force of which the fetters of oppression were at length broken, and hundreds of thousands of unoffending human beings emancipated from the cruelty and degradation of bondage. After the measure of abolition had passed into a law, the vigilant attention and unwearied efforts of the Reviewers were directed to another useful object, that of exposing the selfishness and wickedness of those individuals who, being engaged in the support of slavery, strained every nerve to impede the execution of a statute which would never have been sanctioned, had not the omnipotent power of the people compelled the parliament to yield when it could no longer control.

It is unnecessary to enter into a detailed exposition of the principles of the Edinburgh Review on the subject of West India Slavery. Perhaps no other political journal has done so much to advance the cause of negro emancipation. By its bold and argumentative disquisitions upon every branch of the question, it has created and preserved among the great body of the community a deep and abiding conviction, that nothing effectual will ever be done for the benefit of the slaves, with a view to their speedy and certain liberation, until the united and irresistible voice of the nation, as in the case of the slave trade, shall drive the government into a firm and decided course of policy. It has produced evidence to prove that negro slavery can be extinguished with perfect safety to the colonists and advantage to the blacks. It has shown what means have been employed by the West India party to prevent the gradual process of civilisation. It has exposed their misrepresentations, and overturned all their positions with respect to the comfort and happiness of the slave population. Upon the important topic of free labour and compensation, much useful information and sound reasoning will be found in many articles published during the last few years. In fact, there is not a branch of the question of negro slavery, as it affects every rank

in society in the West India islands, that has not been fully and satisfactorily examined by the writers in the Edinburgh Review; and whenever the time comes, as it speedily will, that the slaves shall be freed from their servitude, gratitude will be especially due to that journal, which for thirty years has laboured, with a zeal that never relaxed, and an enthusiasm that no opposition could abate, to inform and direct the public mind on the subject, and to bring into vigorous operation those resources by which alone the glorious triumph, now happily not far distant, can be achieved without violence and commotion.

The articles on West India Slavery in the Edinburgh Review are in general of great length, and contain copious extracts from various publications and parliamentary documents in support of the writer's sentiments. Without exceeding the limits allotted to the political department of the present work, it would not have been practicable to give more than a few essays on that particular question. Six have been selected which appeared to the editor to embrace matter of general interest, and to involve topics of a disputable nature, upon which it is of paramount importance that the bulk of the community should have the means of forming a correct judgment. The first refers to a question which has engaged the attention of several eminent philosophers; namely, whether the moral and intellectual faculties of the negro be naturally inferior to those of the European, or only the result of peculiar habits attributable to the low state of civilisation in which they have been placed by the existing system of slavery. The latter proposition is defended in the essay under consideration. It is attempted to be demonstrated that the bad qualities of the blacks may be fairly ascribed to the unnatural situation into which they have been thrown. Authorities are cited to prove that in the interior of Africa, where the influence of the Slave Trade exists in a more modified form than on the West Coast, their natural dispositions and mental acquirements are superior to other portions of the race less favourably circumstanced. References are made to several places where the negro population has become free, and received the advantages of education, which are pretty conclusive as to their intellectual capabilities, and to their susceptibility of advancing in every species of religious, moral, and mental improvement, if subjected to a proper mode of training, and provided with the necessary facilities for their progress. This, however, presupposes a complete reform in the colonial system of treatment, which the Reviewer points out in its several gradations, and sketches the happy effects that would result from its adoption.

The second article is intended to establish the right of the British parliament to legislate for the colonies. The arguments used by the planters against the interposition of the mother country are shown to be fallacious. It is at the same time admitted that the government should not interpose its authority, unless the local

assemblies of the islands refuse to execute the laws which the welfare of the slaves requires, or attempt to evade them by frivolous apologies or disreputable manœuvres. As unfounded clamours regarding the rebellion of the slaves have been frequently put forth, to deter the legislature from interfering in a decided manner for their benefit, the Reviewer exposes these apprehensions, and proves, from the conduct of the West India body, both in the mother country and in the colonial assemblies, that they did not seriously entertain any fear of a general insurrection. He justly observes, in concluding his remarks, that "those whom the rhetoric of the cart whip has not urged on to rebel, may well be intrusted with the perusal of Mr. Wilberforce's speech, and the African Institution's Reports; and if the knowledge that their own colour reigns triumphant almost within sight has not given them a disposition to throw off the white yoke, we may with perfect safety adopt measures for mitigating the evils of their condition, and gradually restoring them to the rank of citizens,—and, with their restoration, securing, by the only effectual means, the permanent tranquillity of the islands."

The third article enters into an investigation of the reforms which have been attempted in the West India colonies, and of the reasons advanced by the colonial party against the changes which have been proposed. In reference to religious instruction, the writer conceives that the negroes can never be expected to derive any considerable benefit from it, until their political condition be substantially improved. An able reply is given to the argument of the colonists, that no general conclusions, with respect to the system of slavery, should be drawn from particular instances of oppression; and to the false assumption, that the operation of public opinion, unassisted by positive and clearly defined laws, is sufficient to correct all the evils and abuses growing out of the authority possessed by the slave owners. The state of manners and society in the West Indies is shown to favour the most atrocious violations of the West Indian laws, and that bad customs have given to the whites, in all the slave islands, a character of despotism and violence. In adverting to the threats of the colonists, that they will rebel and throw off their allegiance to the mother country, the author is led to offer some observations upon the value of our West India possessions in a political, military, and commercial point of view. His theory on this subject is opposed to the opinions of those who think that the West Indies have been a source of wealth and revenue to the country. The whole gist of his reasoning is to prove that the colonies will be lost to England, unless prompt and effectual measures be adopted for raising the condition of the slaves, and placing them in the way of speedy and permanent freedom. The subjoined remarks, though written several years since, are peculiarly applicable to the present critical position of the West India colonies, and to the state of public opinion in

England: — "The opposition of the West Indian proprietors cannot affect the ultimate result of the controversy. It is not to any particular party in the Church or the State—it is not to the cathedral or the meeting—that we look exclusively for support. We believe that, on this subject, the hearts of the English people burn within them: they hate slavery; they have hated it for ages. It has, indeed, hidden itself for a time in a remote nook of their dominions; but it is now discovered, and dragged to light. That is sufficient. Its sentence is pronounced, and it never can escape; — never, though all the efforts of its supporters should be redoubled, — never, though sophistry, and falsehood, and slander, and the jests of the pot-house, the ribaldry of the brothel, and the slang of the ring or fives' court should do the utmost in its defence, — never, though fresh insurrections should be got up to frighten the people out of their judgment, and fresh companies to bubble them out of their money, — never, though it should find in the highest ranks of the peerage, or on the steps of the throne itself, the purveyors of its slander, and the mercenaries of its defence!"

The right of parliamentary interference to abolish negro slavery forms the subject of the fourth article, which contains a variety of important facts respecting the colonial history of England. To demonstrate the necessity and expediency of legislative authority, on the part of the mother country, to effect the work of emancipation, the Reviewer adverts to the contumacious opposition of the West Indian assemblies, and shows that nothing of consequence has been done by them to further the views of the British Government; and that, if they were even disposed to act upon them, the prevalence of local influence and prejudice would be a barrier to the accomplishment of the proposed reforms, unless the efforts of the colonial party were backed by the power of the legislature at home.

The fifth article, on the "Social and Industrial Capacities of Negroes," is one of distinguished merit. This question is briefly touched upon in a preceding essay, of which a short analysis has been already given; but in this disquisition it is discussed more fully, and with great talent. Major Moody's Report on the condition of captured negroes, which was published in 1826 by order of the House of Commons, is the principal work criticised by the Reviewer. He considers the Major's report as a defence of West Indian Slavery, on certain new principles, which constitute the philosophy of labour. In proceeding to expose the theory upon which Major Moody has built his opinions, the writer of the article examines the facts from which the following conclusion has been drawn; namely, that "there exists between the white and black races an instinctive and unconquerable aversion, which must for ever frustrate all hopes of seeing them unite in one society on equal terms." The second great principle of the Major, which his critic combats with great skill, but with inferior success, is, that the inhabitants of countries

lying within the torrid zone can be induced to engage in steady agricultural labour only by necessity. An attempt is made to show that the evidence brought forward to establish this point is insufficient. The examples adduced by the Major are those of the liberated Africans in Tortola, of the native Indians within the tropics, of the Maroons of Surinam, and of the Haytians. These are separately investigated, and the inconsistencies and fallacies of the Major's statements pointed out. In reference to the case of Hayti, the Reviewer's arguments are peculiarly interesting, because, if sound, they afford a decisive refutation of a charge upon which the opponents of free labour place their strongest reliance. This charge is summed up in the report as follows: — "That Toussaint, Christophe, and Boyer have all found it necessary to compel the free negroes of that island to employ themselves in agriculture; — that exportation has diminished; — that the quantity of coffee now produced is smaller than that which was grown under the French government; — that the cultivation of sugar is abandoned; — that the Haytians have not only ceased to export that article, but have begun to import it; — that the men indulge themselves in repose, and force the women to work for them; — and, finally, that this dislike of labour can be explained only by the heat of the climate, and can be subdued only by coercion." In replying to these allegations, the author of the article examines at length the proofs adduced in their support, and endeavours to show that they contradict each other. He explains the circumstances why the Haytians have abandoned the cultivation of sugar and coffee; and establishes, from what he considers incontrovertible testimony, that the decrease in their exports does not necessarily prove a decrease in the industry of the people. The last case investigated is that of the free negroes who emigrated from North America to Hayti; and in this, as in the preceding example, Major Moody's hypothesis is attempted to be overthrown. This article has been inserted without abridgement, because it throws a great deal of light on a much disputed question; namely, whether the negroes are adverse to the performance of free labour, and whether they are fitted by nature and habits to advance in intellectual, moral, and religious improvement.

The fifth article relates to the interesting subject of the civil and political disabilities by which the people of colour in the West Indies, or, as they are designated, Mulattoes, are oppressed. An historical sketch is given of those unjust privations, from 1665 down to a recent period; and the question is discussed, whether it would not be both just and expedient to abolish them by an act of the imperial legislature.

The sixth and last essay is on the "Natural Death of Slavery." It was considered deserving of a place in this compilation, in consequence of the opinions maintained by the author on the causes which have retarded a gradual change from slavery to freedom, and on the consequences to the masters of slaves from the general

adoption of free labour. The reasons he advances for the progressive decrease in the number of the slaves in the West Indies are entitled to the serious consideration of those who advocate the existing system.

The department appropriated to "Miscellaneous Politics" comprises eight articles on a variety of topics of no ordinary interest. Their titles are as follow: — "On the Utility of the Balance of Power;" "On the Nature and Uses of Monarchy;" "On the Rights and Duties of the People;" "On the Dangers of the Constitution;" "On the Uses of Party Union;" "On the Dispositions of England and America;" "On the Causes and Consequences of the French Revolution." The first-mentioned essay was contributed to the second number of the Review, and was afterwards embodied in Mr. Brougham's able work on "Colonial Policy." The second article may be regarded as an exposition of the political doctrines of the Review with respect to the superior advantages of an hereditary monarchy over every other form of government. On this point its opinions have never varied; and the essay in question has been repeatedly quoted, in subsequent articles, as a standard of political faith to which the conductors of that journal have undeviatingly adhered. Although it has been severely criticised in contemporary publications by the partisans of democracy, the principles which it is designed to establish, and the reasonings brought forward to support them, are deserving of calm reflection and dispassionate enquiry. The other articles, under the head of Miscellaneous Politics, are devoted to subjects of considerable importance, but of which it would occupy too large a portion of space to give a separate elucidation. They are the work of authors who have contributed to the reputation and usefulness of the Review, and whose names are associated with its early history.

The two last departments on which it will be necessary to offer any remarks are Political Economy and Jurisprudence. One of the most striking proofs of the progress of society in useful knowledge is the advancement which the former science has made in modern times. When the writers in the Edinburgh Review began their labours, its fundamental principles were not known to the general mass, and but imperfectly comprehended even by the eminent men who then guided the destinies of the nation. Of the doctrines advocated by Adam Smith, in his "Wealth of Nations," a few only possessed a correct knowledge: nor is it a matter of surprise, that a branch of information not thoroughly understood by Mr. Pitt, and which Mr. Fox did not stoop to notice, should be as a sealed book to persons of inferior capacity, and totally unknown to the great bulk of mankind. The history of British Legislation for the last thirty years affords too many proofs that our rulers

were frequently ignorant even of the simplest principles of Political Economy. It is to their narrow and discordant views of what it inculcates, and to their inadequate estimate of its importance, that we may trace many of those absurd laws by which the character of Parliament has been disgraced, and the welfare of the nation sacrificed to partial interests and grovelling prejudices.

The conductors of the Review were among the first to remove the prevailing delusions respecting the essential doctrines of the science. They diffused a taste for its acquisition, and impressed upon their readers the importance, with a view to the public interests, of a right understanding of its principles. Without affirming that their reasonings, in some instances, have not been successfully combated by contemporary writers, it is unquestionable that their sound and enlightened views on many interesting subjects have influenced a large portion of society; been sanctioned by the most distinguished politicians; and adopted, though tardily and partially, by government. Political Philosophy has been purified from many dangerous errors and absurdities since the commencement of the present century. Whatever light may have been thrown upon it, in modern times, by free and rational discussion, much of the merit of having qualified a vast number of individuals to comprehend and appreciate its utility must be given to the Edinburgh Review. Its articles have had an astonishing influence in giving popularity to speculations, occasionally received at first with scorn and derision, but which have gradually made converts among all ranks and classes, and become incorporated with the policy of the legislature. In another respect they have been peculiarly beneficial. The intrinsic value of the science has become generally known. The stubborn prejudices, which unfortunately existed against its cultivation, in quarters where more wisdom and liberality might have been expected, have been shaken, or rooted out. The clamour against Political Economy arose, in some measure, from its abstract and complex nature; and has been propagated by writers who affect to ridicule its obscurities, and to doubt its utility, for no more substantial reason, than that they, and those to whom they seek to recommend themselves, shrink, with instinctive repugnance, from the salutary and extensive reforms which will follow the moment its principles are generally understood by the mass of the people. It is remarked by a clever female author, engaged in writing a series of admirable works to instruct the labouring classes in the great truths which the science unfolds, "if it concerns rulers that their measures should be wise, — if it concerns the wealthy that their property should be secure, — the middling classes that their industry should be rewarded, — the poor that their hardships should be redressed, — it concerns all that Political Economy should be understood. If it concerns all that the advantages of a social state should be preserved and improved, it concerns them likewise that Political

Economy should be understood by all."* The propriety of disseminating this species of information among the labouring ranks, and of making it a part of general education, has been frequently enforced in the Edinburgh Review. Though the contributions it contains on every branch of the science were not written expressly for that purpose, yet there are sufficient grounds for believing, that the sound principles which they have so ably defended have found their way into a circle of society, and made a durable impression, where political knowledge of that description was not supposed to exist.

It has been the aim of the editor, in selecting matter for this department, to give at least one article on each of those topics which continue to engage the attention of existing writers, and which are likely to form the subject of parliamentary deliberation. The following enumeration will show that they embrace a wide field of useful enquiry: — Usury Laws; Currency; Free Trade; Taxation; Machinery; Colonies; Poor Laws; Game Laws; Corn Laws; East India Monopoly. These essays, taken as a whole, present a body of political information the value of which it would be difficult to over-rate. The names of the authors are not, in all instances, known. It is generally believed, however, that several of the contributions to the early numbers were from the pen of the late Francis Horner, — whose penetrating intellect, enlarged views, and discriminating judgment, fitted him, in a pre-eminent degree, to elevate the importance and further the objects of political science. In later times, Mr. M'Culloch has enriched this department with many articles of solid merit. He has discussed some of the most complicated questions with a degree of force, simplicity, and precision which no other political economist has equalled. Notwithstanding the vituperation and abuse heaped by monopolists and their tools upon some of his principles and doctrines, they have insinuated themselves, gradually and silently, into the minds of an immense number of sagacious and reflecting politicians. They have found their way into the high places of authority; and those who once regarded them with doubt, indifference, or contempt, have, at last, been obliged to acknowledge their truth, and to ascertain by experience their adaptation to the existing circumstances of society.

A condensed notice of the articles under the present head will be sufficient to convey to the reader a general idea of their character and tendency. The introductory Essay is on the advantages derivable from the study of political economy. The topics of which it treats may be taken in the following order: — the primary objects of the science; — its benefits in teaching mankind how to make labour more productive; — the effects which will accrue to society when the productive powers of industry have become so much im-

* Illustrations of Political Economy, by Harriet Martineau, No. 1.

proved as to afford some accumulation of its products beyond what are required for daily subsistence; — in what respects the study of political economy is important in reference to its practical application; — the circumstances in the altered state of the country which have given it an additional importance in public estimation; — the nature of that policy which those changes have forced on the government; — the rapid progress of the lower orders in this and all other branches of knowledge; — and the necessity of instructing both the rich and the poor in the true principles of the relation by which they are connected with each other.

The second article is an impartial review of Mr. Bentham's celebrated tract on the Usury Laws. The arguments in defence of restraints upon money bargains are concisely and successfully refuted. The following are the reasons alleged in favour of the present laws: — their influence in preventing prodigality, — the protection they afford to indigence and simplicity, — and the encouragement they give to projectors, by opening a free access to the money market. The Reviewer, having proved that these advantages are not produced by the existing restraints, points out the pernicious consequences of which they are the fruitful source. These, he conceives, principally consist in preventing needy persons from supplying themselves with money, unless they evade, by an additional cost, the legal enactments now in force, — in punishing those who have the means of giving a large rate of interest, — and, lastly, in corrupting the morals of the people, by giving birth to treachery and ingratitude. In reference to the supposed efficacy of the laws, the writer of the article contends, that, if wholly successful, their inevitable tendency is to prevent all loans; if partially successful, to raise the terms of the bargain to the borrower, and thus to counteract, in one way or another, the intention of the Legislature in enacting them. The concluding portion of the Essay is intended to expose the costliness and injustice of certain law proceedings, and to enforce the necessity of abolishing particular law taxes, — a measure that has since been effected.

The Currency Question is discussed in the next article. The Reviewer's object is to demonstrate that the restoration of cash or bullion payments affords the only effectual security against depreciation, and against sudden and pernicious fluctuations in the value of paper money. He is in favour of Mr. Ricardo's plan for accomplishing this object, which he transcribes from the works of that eminent political economist, and adduces a number of arguments to show the beneficial effects it would have in restoring the currency to a sound state. He enters into the enquiry whether Bank notes ought to be made exchangeable for gold or silver bullion, and assigns his reasons for preferring the latter as the standard. The evils which have arisen from the extraordinary power given to the Bank of England by the Restriction Act are briefly enumerated; and it is proved, that "such a privilege vested in the hands of a body un-

known to the constitution, and acting under no responsibility, is perfectly anomalous in a free country, and altogether subversive of the security of property." This Essay will be found peculiarly interesting to those unacquainted with the conflicting opinions entertained on the difficult subject to which it refers.

Several years have elapsed since the Edinburgh Review took the lead among the political journals in advocating a recurrence to the sound principle of free trade. When it first undertook to expose the mischievous consequences of monopolies and restrictive laws, they were strenuously upheld by government, by a large portion of the merchants, and by many persons of influence connected with the press. Particular interests had been so long promoted by the sacrifice of general benefit, that it was difficult to convince the people of the safety and expediency of departing from a line of policy which they erroneously supposed had contributed to the power and superiority of Great Britain. It was not until men of comprehensive views and extensive practical information pointed out the broad and rational principles upon which the commercial intercourse of nations should be grounded, that the prejudice in favour of an exclusive policy began to yield. Repeated discussion had the effect of removing popular delusion, which had been fostered by the rulers of the nation, who were, for the most part, disgracefully ignorant of the true principles of political economy. The accumulating force of public opinion was too great even for them to resist; and, under the influence of wiser councils, they consented to strike off some of the shackles by which commerce and manufactures had been fettered. The most violent opponents of the freedom of trade were suddenly transformed into its warmest friends; and the same party that had swelled the majorities of the ministry, and prophesied the ruin of England from its adoption, changed their tactics, and claimed the honour of introducing reforms forced upon them by the Whigs, whose Utopian dreams, as they were denominated, had been the theme of ridicule and abuse. This extraordinary change in the measures of the Cabinet was effected by the gradual enlightenment of the public mind, and *that* was produced by those writers on political economy, who first explained its fundamental truths, and pointed out the ruinous consequences of the monopoly system.

Of the numerous articles on Free Trade, one has been selected, which contains a comprehensive summary of the arguments in favour of leaving foreign commerce completely unfettered. The Reviewer evinces an accurate knowledge of the general theory and the practical bearings of the subject. He furnishes evidence of the injurious effects of the monopoly system, by referring to the state of our commercial intercourse with Norway, Sweden, Russia, Prussia, and Denmark. But it is to France, in particular, he directs the attention of the public; points out the advantage of strengthening the connection between her and Great Britain,

and opening new channels of trade. From the abandonment of an illiberal system of policy, as regards the former nation, he anticipates that the "connection between the two would be so intimate — the one would constitute so near, so advantageous, and so extensive a market for the produce of the other — that they could not remain long at war without occasioning the most ruinous distress, — distress which no government would be willing to inflict on its subjects; and to which, though it were willing, it is probable no people would be disposed to submit." The limited intercourse of Britain with the Eastern nations is adverted to as a striking illustration of the evil consequences of restrictive laws, and the advantages are enumerated which would accrue from opening the vast continent of Asia as a field for the unfettered competition of our merchants. Since this article was printed for the present work, two others of very distinguished merit have appeared in the Review, on the effects of the French and American prohibitive systems, which would have occupied a place in these Selections, had they been published in time.

On the questions of Fiscal Reform, Taxation, and Finance, many excellent Essays might have been selected, but there was not space for their insertion. It is almost unnecessary to mention, that the Edinburgh Review has invariably advocated a real economy in the public expenditure, as absolutely indispensable to diminish the undue influence of the crown. To relieve the burdens and increase the comfort of the labouring classes, it has contended, honestly and firmly, for the diminution of all those taxes which press with peculiar weight on the necessaries of life. As examples of this, it will be sufficient to refer to its papers on the Corn Laws; on the Tea, Sugar, Coffee, and Malt and Beer Duties; and on the Coal Trade. It has also been eminently beneficial in dissecting the financial policy of Mr. Vansittart and his predecessors, who legislated on the false assumption that the revenue is increased by over-taxing every article of luxury. This fallacy has been triumphantly exposed in a series of useful Essays, showing the superior productiveness of moderate duties on wine, brandy, geneva, and other spirits; on cider, sugar, tobacco, wool, timber, glass, calicoes, leather, and paper. Upon all these important topics, the views of the contributors to the Review are sound and comprehensive. Their writings have diffused much useful information among the community, with respect to the evils of excessive taxation, and the abuses arising from the mode of collecting it; and they are entitled to the credit of having suggested every one of the changes recently made in our financial system; and which have completely verified the anticipations of their propounders. Latterly, the Reviewers have co-operated with other liberal journals in opposing the taxes on paper and newspapers, which seem to have been imposed rather to exclude the great body of the people from access to political knowledge, than for the sake of revenue.

The article on Taxation introduced into the present work, under the "Political Economy" head, is intended to describe the effects which must in general result from the imposition of heavy taxes on the necessaries of life, and to unfold the nature and operation of the British system of taxation. It is replete with sound reasoning and extensive knowledge, and contains a luminous exposition of the state of the country at the period when it was written. To analyse its contents with any degree of fulness, would occupy more space than can be conveniently allotted for the purpose. An enumeration of the topics of which it treats will be sufficient to explain its import. The effects of a rapid increase of taxation in depressing the condition of the labouring classes; — the tendency of a slow and gradual increase in the rate of wages; — the causes of an augmentation of pauperism in England since 1793; — an exposure of the fallacy that the debts of the nation are in no way burdensome, because the general wealth is not diminished by the payment of the dividends; — the fortuitous circumstances which conspired to prevent England from feeling, in the full extent, the great pecuniary sacrifices she was compelled to make during the war; — the injustice of the monopoly enjoyed by the agriculturists; — and an estimate of the portion of the produce of the capital and labour of the productive classes of England and Ireland, drawn from them by means of direct and indirect taxation, — by the operation of the Corn Laws, — by contributions for the support of the Church and the poor, and other public burdens.

It is necessary, however, to bear in mind, that this and the other articles on practical Political Economy, inserted in these Selections, have been reprinted, principally, in order to familiarise the reader with the best mode of treating such topics, by laying before him specimens of well condensed reasonings, that have had, and no doubt will continue to have, very great influence on the proceedings of Parliament. It is not meant to be insinuated, and it must not be for a moment supposed, that the measures recommended in these articles, some of which were published nearly twenty years ago, are, in all cases, such as the Reviewers now approve. The change in the economical situation of Great Britain and other countries, within the last few years, has been so great, that statements drawn up at no very considerable distance of time, and then quite accurate, are no longer applicable to the present state of affairs; and we believe that, in a few instances, further reflection and observation have led some of the Reviewers to modify their theories. This, indeed, was only to be expected from the rapidly progressive nature of the science; and from the new statistical facts that are every day being furnished. It is but justice to the authors of the articles now laid before the reader, that we should not forget this explanation.

There is no problem in the science of Political Economy that has given rise to more discussion than the effects of mecha-

nical improvements upon the condition of the labouring classes. Among writers of considerable eminence, a diversity of opinion still prevails. In the article on "Machinery and Accumulation," selected for this work, the question is investigated in a very profound and satisfactory manner. To the opinions of Sismondi and Malthus, who conceive that the distresses of the productive classes have been partly occasioned by the indefinite extension and improvement of machinery, the Reviewer is decidedly opposed. The embarrassments of the merchants and agriculturists, and the poverty of the lower orders, he conceives to have arisen from entirely different causes. He admits that the difficulties in which all descriptions of persons were involved for some years after the peace were produced by the want of a ready market; but he contends that the difficulty of finding purchasers for our commodities was not owing to an increase of the powers of production. He ascribes all the depression then existing in every branch of trade and manufactures to our exclusive commercial system, and the burden of taxation; and replies to the objection that more liberal commercial laws would only produce temporary relief. The principles maintained by Sismondi and Malthus, on the consequences of an extensive use of machinery, are successfully combated. The two most important positions established in this Essay are, that the utmost facility of production must, in every case, be advantageous, and that a saving of expense, and an increase of capital, must also be fraught with obvious benefits.

Whether Colonies are advantageous to the mother country is a subject of considerable importance, and likely to attract a greater degree of public attention as the people become better acquainted with the principles of Political Economy. It is discussed in an excellent article, part of which has since been introduced by its author, Mr. M'Culloch, into his Commercial Dictionary. The introduction, containing an historical sketch of the rise and progress of the colonial system, has been omitted for want of room; but every part is retained that bears upon the immediate question. It is considered both in a commercial and political point of view; and the author, after examining the arguments generally urged in favour of colonial possessions, depicts the evils that have arisen to England from her interference with their domestic concerns, and the trammels she has laid on their industry. A great deal of light is thrown on a topic respecting which much ignorance prevails; namely, the supposed advantages derived by the mother country from the possession of Canada, and her other colonies in North America. To the proposition that the colonial monopoly might be abandoned with advantage to those countries, the West India planters have made several plausible objections, which the writer examines. In referring to an opinion very generally entertained, that an "extensive mercantile is absolutely necessary to the possession of a great warlike navy," he describes a plan by which the "navy

of Great Britain might be as formidable as it now is, or, if that was desirable, infinitely more so, though we had not a single merchant ship." The views developed in this Essay appear to have been adopted after a mature consideration of the subject; and the reader will derive from it much information, not only on the general question of colonial dependencies, but on the injury done to the interests of Great Britain by the continuance of a system which its defenders contend is a source of opulence and security.

The opinions of Mr. Sadler and the Ultra Tories on the doctrines maintained by the "Political Economists," are analysed in a humorous and well-written article taken from a recent number of the Review. The absurdities and contradictions of that gentleman and his supporters are exposed; and the Free Trade system, upon which so much obloquy and mispresentation has been lavished, is defended from the attacks of its opponents by facts and reasonings which it would not be easy to overturn.

The question of the Poor Laws has been frequently and elaborately investigated by the Edinburgh Review. It has consistently opposed the principle that the wants of the poor should be relieved by a compulsory provision. The abuses connected with the administration of the rates in England have been dilated upon, in several articles, by writers qualified to form sound opinions and draw accurate conclusions on the subject. Plans have been suggested to render the practical operation of the existing system less pernicious, and the evidence of competent witnesses has been thoroughly sifted. In selecting, from several able contributions, those which appeared to the Editor best calculated for a publication of this description, he has chosen two that cannot fail of being acceptable to the reader, though the sentiments of the writers are of a very opposite nature. The first is from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Chalmers, who has acknowledged himself to be the author in his work on the "Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns." The views of that eloquent divine on the causes and cure of pauperism have been so often presented to the public, that it would be unnecessary to analyse minutely the contents of his disquisition. It will suffice to observe generally, that it comprises an able vindication of the doctrines of Mr. Malthus respecting the poor, and establishes the truth of two important positions; namely, "that the ills of poverty will never be banished from the world by the mere positive administration of beneficence, and that no power of inquisition can protect a public charity from unfair demands upon it, and demands, too, of such weight and plausibility as must, in fact, be acceded to, and have the effect of wasting a large and even increasing proportion of the fund on those who are not the rightful or the legitimate objects of it." A statement is given of the causes to which the comparative exemption of Scotland from the miseries of pauperism is mainly to be ascribed. The plan of relief adopted in the parishes is held up as a model of practical utility, and the comfort of the Scottish peasantry is attributed, in a great measure,

to its salutary operation. In concluding his strictures, the writer indulges in some reflections on the influence of Christianity in nourishing a principle of independence, and a feeling of repugnance to the degradation of pauperism; and he details the means that should be adopted in the large towns of Scotland to supersede the necessity of legal assessments.

The second article has been attributed to Mr. M'Culloch. It is in every respect worthy of an attentive perusal; the more so that it advocates opinions to which the author was once opposed. He admits that "the tendency, if not otherwise counteracted, of a compulsory provision for the poor, is to increase their numbers, their improvidence, and their profligacy;" but he appears to have discovered, in the course of his enquiries, that "circumstances have most materially counteracted this tendency of the Poor Laws, and have led to the apparent difference, that at present exists, between the theoretical conclusions as to their operation, and the actual results of that operation." These circumstances are stated with clearness and force, and afford adequate proof of the care and attention bestowed upon their examination. The facts adduced are of a remarkable description, and seem to justify the conclusion to which the Reviewer has come, that persons able and willing to work, but who cannot find employment, have a right, under certain restrictions, to obtain relief from some legally devised system. The measures suggested by him for arresting the progress of pauperism are important, and merit the consideration of the Legislature.

The third article is on the "Causes and Cure of Disturbances and Pauperism." It was written soon after the outrages had been perpetrated by the peasantry of the southern counties in England, and immediately subsequent to the accession of Earl Grey's ministry to office. The object of the Reviewer is to show that the distress in the districts of the south cannot be justly ascribed to any general causes, such, for example, as the change in the currency, the effects of heavy taxation, or the alterations in the commercial policy of government. The abuse of the Poor Laws is specified as the main reason for the depressed condition and general discontent of the labouring orders. In order to substantiate this assertion, a lengthened detail is gone into respecting the pernicious effects of the allowance system, which are depicted in a manner peculiarly striking. Two ways are described by which this fertile source of mischief could be effectually done away. These are, "by placing the labourers for whose services there is no real demand on unoccupied and uncultivated lands at home, or by removing them to the colonies." The first of these modes is condemned, as leading to an increase of the evil; and the second is defended, on the ground of its being beneficial to the emigrants, to the labourers who remained at home, and to all classes, "by drying up the most copious source

of internal commotion, and by extending and multiplying our commercial relations with other countries."

It was intimated in a previous part of this Essay, that the Edinburgh Review has on several occasions ridiculed the fears of those who would keep the people in ignorance of politics. The writer of the article to which the above observations refer has expressed his opinions on this subject so unreservedly, and there is so much good sense in his observations, that it may not be improper to transcribe the passage. "If we would prolong that security which has been the principal foundation of our prosperity, we must show the labourers that they are interested in its support; and that whatever has any tendency to weaken it, is even more injurious to them than to any other class. For this reason, we are deeply impressed with the conviction that Parliament ought to lose no time in setting about the organisation of a really useful system of public education. The safety of the empire depends wholly on the conduct of the multitude; and, such being the case, can any one doubt the paramount importance of the diffusion of sound instruction? This is not a subject that ought any longer to be trifled with, or left to individuals or societies. The astounding exhibition of ignorance made at the late trials for rioting shows how wretchedly the agricultural population is educated. A larger proportion of the manufacturing population can read and write; but a knowledge of these arts is not enough. Besides being instructed in them, and in the duties and obligations enjoined by religion and morality, the poor ought to be made acquainted with those circumstances which principally determine their condition in life. They ought, above all, to be instructed in the elementary doctrines of population and wages; in the advantages derived from the institution of private property, and the introduction and improvement of machinery; and in the causes which give rise to that gradation of ranks, and inequality of fortunes, that are natural to society as heat to fire and cold to ice. The interests of the poor are identified with the support of all those great principles, the maintenance of which is essential to the welfare of the other classes. Were they made fully aware that such is the fact, it would be a contradiction and an absurdity to suppose, that the securities for peace and good order would not be immeasurably increased. Those revolutionary and anti-social doctrines, now so copiously distributed, would be rejected at once by an instructed population. But it is not easy to estimate what may be their influence in a period of political excitement and public distress, when addressed to those whose education has been entirely neglected, and whose judgement is, in consequence, guided by prejudice, and not by principle."

The subject of a free trade in Corn is of such magnitude and importance, that it was intended to devote a considerable portion of this work to its discussion. On looking over the numerous articles which the Editor had prepared for selection, it was found that the

opinions maintained in all of them are nearly the same. This circumstance superseded the necessity of giving insertion to more than one on that difficult question. Mr. M'Culloch refers to it as his production, in a note to his edition of "The Wealth of Nations." Intelligent persons may dissent from some of the views developed in this dissertation, and question the soundness of some of the conclusions. It is presumed, however, there can be no disagreement as to the extent of the information displayed, and the comprehensive notice taken of every branch of the controversy. The topics upon which he touches are so diversified in character, that it would not be easy to bring before the eye of the reader a satisfactory exposition of them, within the narrow limits to which this outline must be confined. Perhaps the substance of his arguments may be gathered from the following statement, in his own language, of the propositions which he produces strong and unexceptionable data to establish. The two most important points first settled, are, that the total quantity of all sorts of grain imported into Great Britain and Ireland, in the event of our ports being thrown open, could hardly, under almost any circumstances, exceed from one twentieth to one twelfth part of our entire consumption; and that the price for which such foreign corn could be obtained could not, in ordinary years, be less than 50*s.* a quarter; and would, most probably, range from 52*s.* to 57*s.* He proceeds, in the next place, to prove, that while the abolition of the Corn Laws would be productive of no material injury to the farmers and landlords, by reducing the average price of raw produce, it would, by giving greater steadiness to prices, be no less advantageous to them than to the other classes of the community. An estimate is then made of the pecuniary loss entailed on the country, in ordinary years, by the existing restrictions on the corn trade. Various arguments are recapitulated to demonstrate, that the abolition of the Corn Laws would be equally advantageous to the landlords and farmers as to the other classes; or that, if it could be proved they would really suffer considerable injury, sound policy would even then justify a complete change in the present system, in order to relieve the commercial and manufacturing classes from the burden which it imposes on them. One argument of the agriculturists is answered in a manner that can scarcely fail to produce conviction; namely, that all the principal branches of manufacturing and commercial industry are protected, by means of prohibitory duties, from foreign competition, and that it is only fair and reasonable that agriculture, which is the most important branch, should enjoy the same protection and favour as the rest, — the Reviewer avowing it as his decided opinion, that it will be found impossible to maintain the Corn Laws without deeply endangering the public tranquillity and the security of property. Upon the whole, this article may be regarded the most comprehensive survey of the whole question to be found in the Edinburgh Review, or in any other periodical

journal; and it touches on a variety of considerations which will materially assist the reader in arriving at a just and impartial decision on its merits.

In the dissertation on the Game Laws, to which the Review has been always opposed, there is a statement of the grounds on which they are principally objectionable, of the manner in which they have been executed, and of the various legislative enactments that have been passed on the subject. The remedy proposed is, that the "right of game should be reunited to that of the other interests in land, by putting an end to disqualifying laws; and that its sale should be legalised, by means of licensed dealers, deriving title through a proprietor or occupier of lands." This article is written with ability, and contains a great deal of information.

The concluding Essay, which properly belongs to the department of political economy, relates to the affairs of the East India Company. To the commercial monopoly of that body the Edinburgh Review has always been a determined opponent. Discrepancies in its opinions on matters of subordinate importance may, perhaps, be observed in some of its articles; but it has grappled with the evils of a system which India and Great Britain have reason to deplore. The anti-monopoly doctrines, of which it has been the champion, the valuable information it has communicated respecting our relations with the East, and the appeals it has often made to the feelings, as well as to the interests, of the nation, have roused a spirit of enquiry, and given a power and union to public opinion, that will become irresistible. On referring to the early numbers of that journal, it will be seen that, twenty years ago, it called the attention of government and the people to the vicious principles upon which our vast Eastern territories were governed. When scarcely a voice was raised, or a pen employed, by the political writers of Great Britain, to denounce the exclusive privileges granted to the East India Company, it protested against the extension of the charter, and showed the advantages which would accrue from a more extensive commercial intercourse between Great Britain and the East, and from opening the trade to China. That the reign of British misrule in that quarter of the world is drawing rapidly to an end, cannot be questioned by those who know any thing of the progress of opinion. Whenever that happy period shall arrive, it should not be forgotten that the Edinburgh Review distinguished itself, at an early period, by its hostility to exclusive rights, and laboured zealously to promote a system of liberal policy towards that oppressed and neglected portion of the globe. It was perfectly in accordance with the character of the men who have so ardently pleaded for the cause of liberty in our West India colonies, that they should be equally desirous of extending to our immense dominions in the East the blessings of commerce, wealth, and freedom.

Reference has been made in a note, in another part of this

work, to several useful articles on the monopoly enjoyed by the East India Company. The paper under consideration refers particularly to the trade with China, and other countries to the east of Malacca. Its object is to show the expediency of throwing the trade completely open; and this is done by showing that the Company have not conducted their commercial intercourse on fair and liberal principles, and that it would be carried on to an equal extent, and with greater advantage to the nation at large, by individual enterprise and exertion. The points established by the writer will be more clearly understood, by giving a specific enumeration of them in his own words. First, That the East India Company have raised the price of their teas to so exorbitant a pitch, that they cost the people of Britain 1,800,000*l.* a year more than they would do were the trade open. Secondly, That the teas so overcharged are in no respect superior, in point of quality, to those used in the United States and on the Continent. Thirdly, The Company have defeated the regulations in the Act of 1784, intended to oblige them to put up their tea at its cost price, and to sell it at a small advance; the former, by including in its cost several heavy items that ought not to be included, and by improperly increasing others; and the latter, by understocking the market, and securing a large advance on the upset price. Fourthly, That the following arguments of the Company's advocates are fallacious; namely, that the existence of the monopoly is indispensable to the existence of the trade; that the Chinese are a peculiar people, whose habits and modes of thinking and acting are quite different from those of other nations; that the East India Company have luckily found out the secret of managing them, but that private traders would infallibly get embroiled; and that, were the experiment of opening the trade once made, the inevitable consequence would be, that we should, in a very short time, be driven from the Chinese markets, losing at one and the same time our supplies of tea, and the revenue of about 3,200,000*l.* derived from it. Fifthly, That the trade carried on by the Company has not been of the same extent that it would have been had private adventurers been permitted to engage in it: and lastly, that every vestige of the existing monopoly of the trade with China should not only be abolished, but that the Company should be interdicted from having any thing whatever to do with commercial affairs. These important positions are defended at great length; and the evidence adduced in their support is peculiarly worthy of examination at the present crisis, when Parliament has to legislate upon the East India question.

In concluding this outline of the contents of the work, the Editor has yet to notice the articles inserted under the head of "Law and Jurisprudence." These are six in number, and equally attractive and useful with those allotted to other divisions. It is matter of general notoriety that the Edinburgh Review is enriched with a large mass of contributions of this class, written by some of the most

distinguished members of the legal profession. It has been a favourite object with its principal writers to impress upon government the necessity of reforming, speedily and effectually, the whole system of our laws, in all its multifarious departments, and of rendering them intelligible, accessible, and cheap. In pursuing this laudable end, they have shared largely in the opprobrium and misrepresentation which are the never-failing reward of those who have supported the efforts of Romilly, Mackintosh, and Brougham, in cutting away the most noxious parts of British jurisprudence, — the delay, expense, and vexation of justice. Without expatiating on the particular measures of law reform to which the Review has given its cordial support, it may suffice to indicate generally the principal subjects treated of connected with that department: — The Scottish Judicial System; Criminal Code; Abuses in Chancery; Conveyancing; Codification; Prison Discipline; Laws relating to Literary Property; Law of Evidence; Criminal Procedure and Publicity; Alien Laws; Law of Entails and Primogeniture; Benefit of allowing Counsel to Prisoners; Police of the Metropolis; Public Registry in England; Irish Courts of Quarter Sessions; Courts of Local Jurisdiction; besides elaborate discussions on the political and philosophical theories of the late Mr. Bentham, and on various questions of minor importance.

From the foregoing articles a few have been selected, principally relating to those reforms in our judicial system, which are the topics of existing controversy, and are likely to occupy the attention of the Legislature. The exertions of the Edinburgh Review have been eminently beneficial in impressing upon the minds of the people a strong feeling of repugnance to the injustice and severity of the criminal law of England. The necessity of ameliorating its character, and of adapting it to the opinions and feelings of an enlightened era of society, has been enforced in several argumentative Essays. In the Essay on this subject transferred to these pages, the question of capital punishments is very ably discussed; the inconsistencies and anomalies of the English criminal code exposed in a forcible manner, and the evils of its operation depicted, as they affect the culprit, the prosecutors, the jury, and the community.

Sir James Mackintosh has stated, in his "Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy," prefixed to the new edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica, that the Review of "Bentham's Treatise on Codification" was contributed by Sir Samuel Romilly. Independently of its undoubted merit as a specimen of acute and sound reasoning on a topic of great public interest, the pleasure of the reader will be increased by his knowledge of the fact, that it was the production of a man equally distinguished as a lawyer, a legislator, a patriot, and a philanthropist.

The functions of the Lord Advocate of Scotland form the subject of an interesting dissertation. The objections to the office are investigated, and various remedies are propounded which the Re-

viewer conceives would be effectual in removing the abuses inseparable from a situation of such extensive discretionary authority. The propriety of introducing Grand Juries into the Scottish judicial system has been frequently doubted. The grounds upon which the writer thinks they would be beneficial, under certain regulations, are given in detail. He refutes the arguments of those who affect to dread so large an innovation. The subject, considered in every point of view, is one of much importance; and it is ably elucidated.

The article on Entails and the Law of Primogeniture has been ascribed to Mr. M'Culloch. With regard to the former, he gives a sketch of the laws affecting the division of property in the earlier stages of society, and then proceeds to investigate the reasons urged in favour of Entails. Considered in a political point of view, he is favourable to the right conferred by that law, under particular restrictions, and in countries where there are hereditary legislators. But he admits that "a system of inviolable and perpetual entail is highly injurious to the best interests of society; and though the constitution of the country may be such as to require the privilege to be granted to a particular class, it is quite impossible it can ever be such as to require it should be granted to all." Of the custom of primogeniture he is a decided advocate. His opinion is, that the wealth, freedom, and civilisation of modern Europe have been increased by its influence. He adduces the effects of the law of succession, as established in France, in support of his views. He contends, that the improvement which has taken place since the Revolution, in the condition of the agricultural classes in that country, cannot be fairly attributed to the law of equal inheritance. On this point much useful information is given, and also on the influence which the minute subdivision of landed property has had upon the population of France, and of Ireland, where the custom of equally dividing the paternal property has long prevailed. In reference to the consequences of the law of primogeniture on the political interests of the nation, he considers that aristocratical influence, if unaided by artificial privileges, "essentially contributes to the improvement and stability of the public institutions of such densely peopled countries as France and England, and forms the best attainable check to arbitrary power on the one hand, and to popular frenzy and licentiousness on the other." In this respect, his sentiments differ from those of many political philosophers. The question is of peculiar importance, whether considered in itself, or in its political and moral bearings. At the present period, when the law of primogeniture has become a topic of vague and heated declamation, the facts and reasonings contained in this Essay may be of much use, and may induce intelligent and reflecting persons to devote to the investigation of the question the requisite degree of labour and research. An answer to this article was published in the "Westminster Review," in an able but not less petulant paper.

The services of the Edinburgh Review in promoting the cause of Juridical Reform have been already mentioned in terms of commendation. In the Essay on "Capital Punishment for Forgery," published in a recent number, that objectionable part of our criminal code is examined by a writer who brings to the task the requisite qualifications. His ideas of legislation are sound and enlightened. He denies the validity of the objection, that it is unlawful, under any circumstances, to take away the life of a human being for any offence, however enormous. His argument is simply this:—If it can be proved that "capital punishment has sufficient power to deter from the commission of crime, then there can be no good reason assigned for not taking away the lives of cruel and hardened offenders." But he shows that capital punishments have utterly failed in effecting the only object which can justify their infliction; and that a penalty of a milder nature, which was certain to be enforced, would be much more likely to prevent society from being injured by notorious transgressors. The inefficiency of the capital penalty, then in existence, as applied to the individuals convicted of forgery, is adverted to; and a variety of considerations are urged, illustrative of the pernicious effects it has produced. In the conclusion of the article, a detail is given of the conduct of the ministry, and the proceedings of Parliament, relative to the Bill introduced into the House of Commons to abolish the punishment for the crime of forgery, but which was rejected by a small majority in the House of Lords.

The reader will derive information and pleasure from the last contribution to the law department of the work. It is entitled "Political and Vested Rights," and branches out into so great a variety of topics, all of deep interest and importance, that it would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of its merits by a mere outline of the contents. There are some admirable remarks, vindicating the English people from the charge frequently brought against them by the opponents of political improvement, of being adverse to ancient forms and institutions, and hostile to the rights of property. These misrepresentations lead the Reviewer to discuss at considerable length the subject of natural rights and duties, in the exposition of which great research and acuteness are displayed. On the delicate question of corporate privileges, and trusts given to political bodies, his observations apply with peculiar force to the fallacies propagated by the enemies of Parliamentary Reform relative to vested rights. Burke's arguments against any alteration in the system of representation are very successfully exposed; and it is shown by various references to the constitutional history of England, that both in the constitution of the Houses of Lords and Commons important and extensive changes have taken place. Several instances are quoted of the surrender of vested privileges, when it was necessary to effect some great object of political amelioration. The following censure

on the conduct of the established clergy, in relation to the Reform Bill, is worth quoting, because it evinces the anxious solicitude of the Review that the Church of England should be thoroughly purified from its abuses: — "It has been a matter of surprise and pain to us, that so many pastors of a Christian Church should have deemed it decent to make common cause with the rotten boroughs. We lament that the clergy and the body of the English people seem, at least in political opinion and feeling, to be separated by such a distance — we had almost said such a chasm. Clergymen have as much right to their own sentiments as any other members of the community. But our regret is not the less that this difference in sentiment should exist; nor are our apprehensions less serious for the consequences to which a pertinacious adherence in, and an active manifestation of, extreme opinions may ultimately lead. The sort of opposition which a people will the least forgive, is that which implies the existence of separate interests and of personal distrusts. The necessity that the Church of England must, in many points, itself submit to be reformed, is no secret. Calmly and judiciously reformed, it will remain a national blessing, and speedily regain the affections of the people. The only question is, by whom, and in what manner, and to what extent, this shall be done. A collected opposition by the leaders of the Church against a measure of pure political reformation must tend to generate most suspicious inferences, and unavoidable bitterness. Such an occurrence would, therefore, seriously endanger the present prospect of confining within its proper limits, and of peaceably accomplishing, that species of reform, which the end and popularity of the ecclesiastical institutions of England absolutely require."

After the copious account that has been given of the contents of this work, it may be expected that some explanation should be offered respecting those subjects which have been excluded. Of the articles in the Edinburgh Review worthy of being preserved, there was not room in four octavo volumes to insert more than a very limited number. It is probable, therefore, that the reader will feel disappointed when he finds that many have been omitted which he perused with delight when published, and that others have been retained apparently less calculated to excite his interest. The Editor conceives that some allowance should be made for the obstacles he has had to encounter. Considering the great diversity of topics discussed in the Review, and the number of admirable contributions on each, it was an undertaking of no ordinary difficulty to compress within comparatively narrow limits a judicious selection from a mass of matter comprising more than twenty-eight thousand pages, and to classify the topics, so as to please the taste of a numerous class of readers, and to assign to each its proper space. In accomplishing this object, it seemed necessary to exclude several departments which appeared not to come within the scope and

aim of the publication. As the original work contains numerous articles on the same subject, it was deemed expedient to select under each head one or two of the best, and to make references to those which could not be inserted. Persons who possess complete sets of the Edinburgh Review will find these explanatory notes of use, as affording the convenience of an index.

Extracts from books reviewed have not been given, except where they were required to illustrate the opinions of the critic. As the design of this compilation is to preserve original dissertations of real value, and not a mere collection of interesting passages from well-known authors, it was indispensable that the selections should be principally restricted to the productions of the Reviewers. In some instances, the names of contributors have been annexed in connection with their respective criticisms. Reasons have elsewhere been assigned why this plan could not be generally adopted. Under peculiar circumstances, as, for example, where the writers have acknowledged their own compositions, or where the secret has transpired since their death, or been imparted to the world through other channels, there was no impropriety in pointing out an author whose mask was already removed.

Concerning those departments from which no articles have been compiled, it may be proper to make a few remarks. It is known to the readers of the Edinburgh Review that its early numbers are enriched with a series of masterly disquisitions on the various branches of physical science. The most brilliant and profound of this class were written by Professors Playfair and Sir John Leslie, who have given a powerful impulse to scientific enquiries by their periodical lucubrations, and diffused over the path of science the radiance of genius and the graces of eloquence. It was at first intended to embody in this work some of these productions; but, on reflection, the Editor was of opinion that they were in general of too abstract and complex a nature to be generally interesting. On the same grounds, he has felt himself justified in rejecting all articles of classical criticism, though many of them were furnished by the first scholars of the age.

The reviews of Voyages and Travels were not adapted to the plan of this undertaking. They are principally made up of analyses, or quotations; and, of course, afford but limited scope for original speculation. It must be admitted, too, that this of all departments is that in which the Edinburgh Review has been least successful.

The Edinburgh Review has been assailed in several quarters for neglecting the Theological department of English literature. It is unquestionable that only a few of the works of our most eminent divines have been honoured with its notice. This has probably arisen from a wish to avoid the discussion of jarring opinions on religion. A literary and political journal is certainly not a fit place to investigate the truth of theological tenets. Some doubts, how-

ever, may exist whether the general character of pulpit eloquence, and the spirit which pervades some of our most popular works on divinity, might not have been more frequently examined by the Edinburgh Review, without stirring the bile of the fanatic, or wounding the feelings of the most fervent believer in Christianity. On the other hand, it must be admitted that, on the few occasions when the merits of theologians have been canvassed, the scales of critical justice have been held with a steady and impartial hand. It will be found that, without reference to doctrinal points, or the comparative excellence of particular creeds, liberal commendation has been bestowed on the intellect and profound learning of Horsley, — the taste and graceful composition of Alison — the unaffected piety of Morehead, — the masculine understanding and fervent zeal of Moncreiff, — the benevolence, simplicity, and gentleness of Heber. From reviews of this class many beautiful passages might have been extracted, but there were few of sufficient length to entitle them to the appellation of essays. Wherever the writer has gone at any length into the examination of general principles, or delineated the distinguishing characteristics of illustrious divines, his observations have been given without abridgment.

The Edinburgh Review contains a number of valuable notices of biographical works. Great pains have been taken to condense the most interesting, as the majority, though useful as a register of facts and incidents, have not furnished topics for elaborate dissertation. In conformity with the plan laid down by the Editor, he has retained only those parts in which the critic has given sketches of literary, personal, and public character.

The articles on Trade, Manufactures, Finance, Statistics, Geography, and on topics of a local nature, though replete with useful information, were not applicable to the purpose which the compiler had in view.

In arranging the poetical criticisms, he did not conceive it right to give a place to several which created no ordinary sensation when they first appeared, but which were either unnecessarily pungent, or grew out of circumstances that no longer exist.

No portion has been selected of the controversy on the logic and politics of the Utilitarians, which arose out of a critique on "Mill's Essays on Government," in the 97th Number of the Review. It would not have been treating either party fairly, had the articles been presented in a mutilated form; and unless the whole had been given, with the replies of the Westminster Review, the main points of the dispute would not have been understood by the reader.

Before concluding, the Editor feels it incumbent on him to advert to one or two points connected with the character of the Edinburgh Review, upon which, if he were silent, his motives might be liable to misrepresentation. There is no necessity for disguising

the fact, that its religious principles have been impugned by a class of writers who seem to make a lucrative traffic of their piety, and to acquire a reputation for godliness by casting imputations on others. These persons first raised the cry of infidelity against the conductors of the Review, and affirmed that the tendency of their productions was hostile to Christianity. To support this charge they descended to misrepresentation, bringing forward, as proof of their calumnies, detached sentences from particular articles, which, when fairly examined, do not bear the interpretation attached to them. Many striking examples of this disingenuous mode of criticism might be selected from their attacks. There is no foundation for the imputation that the Christian religion has ever been spoken of in irreverent terms by the Edinburgh Review, its fundamental principles denied, its ennobling influence questioned, or its consolations ridiculed. It may have erred in exposing bigotry and cant, in a tone of levity and sarcasm not very suitable to the gravity of the subject. The peculiarities of sects, however ludicrous in themselves, and favourable to the growth of fanaticism, had better not be treated in a light jocular manner. Wit is misapplied, if it be calculated to wound the feelings of those who attach a religious importance to what other persons laugh at as revolting absurdity or extravagant zeal. If serious mischief to the cause of religious truth be apprehended from the prevalence of enthusiasm, or of a domineering asperity, the most effective weapons for arresting its progress are fair reasoning, conciliatory address, and calm appeals to the common sense of mankind. In these qualities some of the essays in the Review may be deficient; but it is utterly untrue that it has ever abetted infidelity, or denied the beneficial influence of revelation.

The charge of having propagated anti-christian doctrines rests on such futile and preposterous grounds, that no writer of honest intentions could have framed it, nor any reader of ordinary sagacity have given it the slightest credit. Who could have supposed that paying a compliment to Gibbon, not on account of his scepticism, but as the celebrated historian of the Roman Empire; that designating Hume as a "great Scottish philosopher, and a man of unrivalled sagacity;" that eulogising Voltaire as an "original genius and a brilliant wit;" and that characterising the society of Diderot, Grimm, and Rousseau, as the "most refined and accomplished," should have been interpreted into an approval of their principles?

If it were deemed worth while to expose the falsehood of this aspersion, numerous passages might be pointed out in the Edinburgh Review, in which the strongest opinions are expressed of the necessity and advantages of religion. The main cause of offence is, that it has rebuked the pride, dogmatism, and intolerance of several prelates of the established church; whilst it has praised the disinterestedness and tolerant spirit of others, whom it was once the fashion to decry, because they disdained to mingle in

the cabals of a court, and to participate in the corruption of their brethren.

There are strong reasons for suspecting that the hostility manifested to the Edinburgh Review, for its imputed heresies in religion, is the offspring of political enmity. It is a remarkable circumstance, that liberalism in politics should be associated in the minds of so many persons with laxity in matters of faith. If a man of principle and enlightened opinions distinguish himself as a reformer, the work of detraction commences, and he is branded as a revolutionist. But if he should denounce the abuses of the church, and labour for its purification, that it may be saved from ruin, he is marked out for popular odium as a deist or an atheist!

It is partly on this account that so much ingenuity has been exercised to bring home the charge of irreligion against the Edinburgh Review. The probability is, that the subject would never have been mooted, had it supported the Penal Code, the Corporation and Test Acts, the disabilities of the Jews, and the various oppressive enactments devised by intolerant legislators to shackle freedom of conscience. Its attacks on the "altar and the throne" would never have been trumpeted abroad, had it been the champion of tyranny on the Continent, and defended the excesses of arbitrary power in England; — had it apologised for the vices of the government, and shown no lenity to the faults of the people; — had it taught passive obedience to the community, and inculcated the necessity of no surrender to their rulers. It may be taken for granted, that had it been silent on the evils of tithes, church patronage, rotten boroughs, excessive taxation, pensions and places, commercial monopolies, colonial oppression, law abuses, gagging acts, persecutions of the press, and Irish grievances, the writers would have escaped the censures of their present adversaries; no obloquy would have been thrown on them for defending the Catholics, laughing at the Quakers, and sneering at the Methodists; they would have been praised as the staunch supporters of church and state, as patriots and sages who devoted their talents to protect our political and religious institutions from the unbridled license of democratic innovation.

Another reason may be advanced for the attacks that have been made on the religious principles of the Edinburgh Review. It has been the friend of universal toleration; and those who think that religion cannot flourish without the aid of penal laws, are apt to suspect that the advocates of freedom of thought and discussion cannot be sound in the faith. They believe, that if the government do not give an ascendency to one sect over another, its policy cannot be bottomed upon religious views. They are at a loss to comprehend how a professor of Christianity can be sincere and ardent in his opinions, if he extend the benefit of unrestricted religious freedom to those who have the temerity to break loose from

the trammels of existing opinions. Notwithstanding the boasted liberality of modern times, and the rapid spread of knowledge amongst all classes, there is much truth in the following observations: — "Men have extended their sphere of liberality, but it is not yet without limits. There is still a boundary in speculation, beyond which no one is allowed to proceed; at which innocence terminates, and guilt commences; — a boundary not fixed and determinate, but varying with the creed of every party. Although the advanced civilisation of the age rejects the palpably absurd application of torture and death, it is not to be concealed, that, amongst a numerous class, there is an analogous, though less barbarous persecution, of all who depart from received doctrines — the persecution of private antipathy and public odium. They are looked upon as a species of criminals; and their deviations from established opinions, or their speculative errors, are regarded by many with as much horror as flagrant violations of morality. In the ordinary ranks of men, where exploded prejudices often linger for ages, this is scarcely to be wondered at; but it is painful, and on a first view unaccountable, to witness the prevalence of the same spirit in the republic of letters; — to see mistakes in speculation pursued with all the warmth of moral indignation and reproach. He who believes an opinion on the authority of others, who has taken no pains to investigate its claims to credibility, nor weighed the objections to the evidence on which it rests, is lauded by his acquiescence; while obloquy from every side is too often heaped on the man who has minutely searched into the subject, and been led to an opposite conclusion." *

These observations are not inapplicable to the Edinburgh Review; for it will be found that the "persecution of private antipathy and of public obloquy" is not confined exclusively to those who promulgate tenets which the majority think are both untrue and dangerous; but it extends to all who have the courage to defend the victims of religious error from fanatical denunciations and coercive laws. It is a crime in the eyes of many weak-minded individuals, that the Reviewers should not only have recommended the abolition of all legal restraints on the publication of opinions, whether religious or political, but that they should have lent their protection to unbelievers. It is, indeed, a fact, that they have inculcated charity even to infidels, and opposed those oppressions which, to adopt their own language, "encircle a religion pure, merciful, and philosophical, — a religion to the evidences of which the highest intellects have yielded, — with the defences of a false and bloody persecution." These, then, are the causes from which the aspersion has sprung, that they have attempted, secretly and cowardly, to undermine the immovable foundations of Christianity. Passages may have been written calculated to make an impression

* Author of the Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions, p. 91.

that was not intended; errors may have been exposed in a manner less grave and didactic than the nature of the subject justified; intolerance and folly may not have been rebuked with sufficient courtesy; but no charge of irreligion can be maintained for a moment.

It has been just observed, that liberalism and infidelity are by many considered synonymous. If this be true, the author of the following beautiful passage must plead guilty. It is quoted, because it contains an eloquent exposition of the opinions which the Edinburgh Review has laboured to diffuse. The writer is alluding to the tolerant conduct of the church and government, on a particular occasion, with respect to blasphemous publications: — "The ark of God was never taken till it was surrounded by the arms of earthly defenders. In captivity, its sanctity was sufficient to vindicate it from insult, and to lay the hostile fiend prostrate on the threshold of his own temple. The real security of Christianity is to be found in its benevolent morality, in its exquisite adaptation to the human heart, in the facility with which its scheme accommodates itself to the capacity of every human intellect, in the consolation which it bears to the house of mourning, in the light with which it brightens the great mystery of the grave. To such a system it can bring no addition of dignity or of strength, that it is part and parcel of the common law. It is not now for the first time left to rely on the force of its own evidences, and the attractions of its own beauty. Its sublime theology confounded the Grecian schools in the fair conflicts of reason with reason. The bravest and wisest of the Cæsars found their arms and their policy unavailing when opposed to the weapons that were not carnal, and the kingdom that was not of this world. The victory which Porphyry and Diocletian failed to gain, is not, to all appearance, reserved for any of those who have in this age directed their attacks against the last restraint of the powerful, and the last hope of the wretched. The whole history of the Christian religion shows, that she is in far greater danger of being corrupted by the alliance of power, than of being crushed by its opposition. Those who thrust temporal sovereignty upon her, treat her as their prototypes treated her author. They bow the knee, and spit upon her; they cry, 'Hail!' and smite her on the cheek; they put a sceptre into her hand, but it is a fragile reed; they crown her, but it is with thorns; they cover with purple the wounds which their own hands have inflicted on her; and inscribe magnificent titles over the cross on which they have fixed her to perish in ignominy and pain."*

In conclusion, the Editor feels reluctant to pass over in silence an imputation of a political nature, cast upon the Edinburgh Review.

* Edinburgh Review, vol. I. p. 555.

There are two descriptions of opponents with whom it has had to contend at different periods,—the Tories and the Radicals. It has been abused by the former for its seditious and revolutionary doctrines. It is worth while to remark, that this charge was got up to further the objects of faction, at a time when the feelings of all classes were shocked by the appalling crimes of the French Revolution. The partisans of unlimited authority dexterously availed themselves of the atrocities committed by the French, as a pretext for resisting the most cautious and moderate innovation, and ruling the people with a rod of iron. As it is forcibly expressed by the Reviewer of "Fox's History of James the Second," "while a raging fever of liberty was epidemic in the neighbourhood, the ordinary diet of the people appeared too inflammatory for their constitution; and it was thought advisable to abstain from articles which, at all other times, were allowed to be necessary for their health and vigour. Thus, a sort of tacit convention was entered into, to say nothing, for a while, of the follies and vices of princes, the tyranny of courts, or the rights of the people. The revolution of 1688, it was agreed, could not be mentioned with praise, without giving some indirect encouragement to the revolution of 1789; and it was thought as well to say nothing in favour of Hampden, or Russell, or Sidney, for fear it might give spirit to Robespierre, Danton, or Marat. To this strict regimen the greater part of the nation submitted of their own accord; and it was forced upon the remainder by a pretty rigorous system of proceeding."* Long after all well-grounded fears of the influence and spread of French principles had passed away, the carnage which had disgraced France was referred to, by the supporters of despotic measures, as a sufficient reason for checking the advancement of free opinions by the unconstitutional exercise of authority. In fact, liberal-minded but timid men were frightened into abject servility. It was to be expected, that a journal which aimed to rouse them from this torpor, and to impress upon their rulers the salutary lesson, that a timely concession to the just demands of the people is the most effectual mode of preventing the necessity of revolution, should be denounced as opposed to the real interests of mankind. To this source, then, may be traced all the obloquy which the Tories have thrown on the Edinburgh Review whenever it urged the Legislature to follow with cautious but certain steps the progress of public opinion. Had it not been the fashion of the times to write down every man a Jacobin who was desirous of increasing the strength of government, by surrounding it with the affections of the nation at large, the political contributors to the Edinburgh Review would have escaped the imputation of being disaffected to the British constitution.

The Radical Reformers had more reason to be dissatisfied with the organ of the Whig party. As an able writer in the Review

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xii. p. 278.

has not deemed it improper to notice their charges, and to enter into an exposition of its political opinions, it will be best to give in his own words the substance of the accusation and the defence: — "In reference to the dangers to which the conflict of opposite extremes must always expose the peace and the liberty of a country like England, we may be allowed, perhaps, to say a word or two in answer to the manifold attacks which we, and the party to which we are supposed to belong, have had to sustain, from the extreme parties of the Tories on the one hand, and the Radicals on the other. We should regret extremely if the interest or credit of the old constitutional Whigs should ever have been compromised, in public opinion, by any weakness or rashness of ours: — and that not only because we certainly have no warrant to hold ourselves out as their spokesmen, but because, though agreeing in the main with their tenets, we do not profess to acknowledge their authority, or to be guided in our opinions by any thing but our own imperfect lights. The imputations to which we now allude, however, certainly do not touch us individually — at least in the view we take of them, but are plainly applicable to all who happen to stand midway between the two contending factions, and therefore in an eminent degree to the true constitutional Whigs of 1688 — with whom, in this question, we are proud to be identified.

"The topics of reproach which these two opposite parties have recently joined in directing against us seem to be chiefly two: — *First*, that our doctrines are timid, vacillating, compromising, and inconsistent; and, *secondly*, that the party which holds them, and to which they are addressed, is small, weak, despised, and unpopular. These are the texts, we think, of those whose vocation it has lately become to preach against us, from the pulpits either of servility or democratical reform.

"The *first* charge, then, is, That the Whigs are essentially an inefficient, trimming, half-way sort of party — too captious, penurious, and disrespectful to authority, to be useful servants in a Monarchy; and too aristocratical, cautious, and tenacious of old institutions, to deserve the confidence, or excite the sympathies, of a generous and enlightened People. Their advocates, accordingly — and we ourselves in an especial manner — are accused of dealing in contradictory and equivocating doctrines; of practising a continual see-saw of admissions and retractions; of saying now a word for the people — now one for the aristocracy — now one for the crown; of paralysing all our liberal propositions by some timid and paltry reservation, and never being betrayed into a truly popular sentiment without instantly chilling and neutralising it by some cold fears of excess, some cautious saving of the privileges of rank and establishment.

"Now, while we reject, of course, the epithets which are here applied to us, we admit, at once, the facts on which our adversaries profess to justify them. We acknowledge that we are fairly charge-

able with a fear of opposite excesses; a desire to compromise and reconcile the claims of all the great parties in the State; an anxiety to temper and qualify whatever may be said in favour of one, with a steady reservation of whatever may be due to the rest. To this sort of trimming, to *this* inconsistency, to this timidity, we distinctly plead guilty. We plead guilty to a love for the British Constitution — and to all and every one of its branches. We *are* for King, Lords, and Commons; and, though not, perhaps, exactly in that order, we are proud to have it said that we have a word for each in its turn; and that, in asserting the rights of one, we would not willingly forget those of the others. Our jealousy, we confess, is greatest of those who have the readiest means of persuasion; and we are far more afraid of the encroachments of arbitrary power, under cover of its patronage, and the general love of peace, security, and distinction, which attract so strongly to the region of the Court, than of the usurpations of popular violence. But we are for authority, as well as for freedom. We are for the natural and wholesome influence of wealth and rank, and the veneration which belongs to old institutions, without which no government has ever had either stability or respect,—as well as for that vigilance of popular control, and that supremacy of public opinion, without which none could be long protected from abuse. We know that, when pushed to their ultimate extremes, those principles may be said to be in contradiction. But the escape from inconsistency is secured by the very obvious precaution of stopping short of such extremes. It was to prevent this, in fact, that the English constitution, and indeed government in general, was established. Every thing that we know that is valuable in the ordinances of men, or admirable in the arrangements of Providence, seems to depend on a compromise, a balance; or, if the expression is thought better, on a conflict and struggle, of opposite and irreconcilable principles. Virtue, society, life itself, and, in so far as we can see, the grand movements and whole order of the universe, are maintained only by such a contention." *

These seem to be the main points in that political creed to which the Edinburgh Review has adhered amidst every fluctuation in public affairs, and every change in the councils of the nation. That it does not in all respects coincide with the sentiments of a party increasing in number, and in the means of giving a wide diffusion to its principles, is a fact which no one will dispute who knows any thing of the existing state of political opinions in Great Britain. The most decisive proofs are afforded in the writings of the periodical press, in the resolutions of popular meetings, and in the determined tone of the middle and lower classes of society, that the temper of the times is adverse to moderation. The reluctance with which the Tories have on all occasions granted the smallest con-

* Edinburgh Review, vol. xlv. p. 37.

cessions to the popular will, and the dubious policy of many measures which the Whigs have recently sanctioned, have awakened among the body of the people a spirit of discontent which will not be appeased, until reforms be carried of a more extensive nature than the most distempered visionary would, a few years since, have ventured to countenance. But those portentous indications which mark the present crisis have no immediate reference to the grounds on which the Edinburgh Reviewers have felt themselves justified in taking a middle course between the extremes of two classes of politicians, each attached to its own doctrines, and resolved at all hazards to maintain them.

It has been their anxious desire to see the people instructed in the principles of political science, and invested with real moral power to effect safely and gradually those reformations in established laws and institutions which the new wants and advancing intelligence of the community imperatively demand. In the pursuit of this object, they have recommended repair, and not demolition. Distrusting extravagant theories, and questioning the applicability of abstract principles, however ingenious and sound, to all countries and all conditions of society, they have preferred measures of practical utility, to plausible schemes of regeneration, which are not attainable in the existing state of knowledge and public opinion. At the same time, it must not be concealed that the moderation which it has been their policy to maintain has occasionally involved them in apparent contradictions, and exposed them to the reproach of compromising their independence. It was the unavoidable consequence of occupying an intermediate position between two parties, that they have not followed, with the rapidity of a more enthusiastic and less calculating description of writers, that constantly accelerating power which the influence of their exertions first called into being. These considerations will account satisfactorily for their leaning to aristocratical interests, their fear of the too sudden ascendency of democratical power, and their cautious mode of dealing with the defects in the representative system, and the evils of a church establishment in alliance with the state. It is observed by the author of the essay from which a passage has been already given, that "in our principles, and the ends at which we aim, we do not materially differ from what is proposed by the more sober of the thorough reformers, though we require more caution, more securities, more temper, and more time." In conformity with the spirit of these remarks, they have varied their policy with the exigencies of the times. As the great elements of power, wealth, and knowledge have been more widely diffused, they have pointed out the necessity of granting more extensive ameliorations, such as would bring ancient institutions into perfect harmony with modern opinions, and the intellectual progress of the age.

Those who declaim most loudly against the trimming principles

of the Edinburgh Review, should recollect that its influence in forwarding popular measures would not have been half so powerful, had it set out by maintaining the ultra opinions of the Radical party. What was the state of affairs for several years after the French Revolution, but particularly at the period when that journal first attempted to kindle in the breasts of freemen the principles of independence? Was it not the favourite object of the government to check the forward progress of society? Did it not labour, by means of corruption and threats, to inspire in the minds of the people a dread of innovation? Was it not its policy to persuade them that there was no intermediate step between reform and the horrors of anarchy? This artful scheme, which it was supposed would effectually tame the spirit of the nation, and stifle the popular voice, might have eventually succeeded, had not the Whig politicians of the Edinburgh Review followed a middle course, — had they not, on the one hand, endeavoured to restrain the prerogative of men in authority; and, on the other, to control the inconsiderate zeal of those whose schemes of political improvement, if they had been forced prematurely on the nation, would have retarded, if not indefinitely delayed, some of the most efficient reforms that have since taken place.

To any reflecting well-informed man who has watched the course of political events for the last thirty years, and who knows the exact state of the public mind and of political knowledge at the beginning of the present century, it must appear evident that the Edinburgh Review would have failed to accomplish such important services for the cause of freedom and justice, had it taken the lead among the Radical party. By exhorting the Tories to give up their struggle for the maintenance of old abuses, — the Whig aristocracy to unite with the people, and guide them in their pursuit of rational liberty, — and the supporters of democratical measures to modify their pretensions, it effected more for the people's rights than if it had dilated on the first principles of government, and proved the superiority of republican over monarchical institutions.

There is only another point in its conduct requiring explanation. It has been taunted with defending or palliating on all occasions the indiscretions and tergiversations of the Whigs. That it has been identified with the leading principles of that party it has never sought to conceal, and that many of the great questions of national justice which it has advocated originated with that party cannot be denied. But this is a different thing from an indiscriminate and suspicious vindication of every political measure to which the Whigs may have given their support. Many articles might be referred to in the Edinburgh Review in which their faults are freely and deservedly censured. In confirmation of this statement, there requires no stronger testimony than the following extract from an Essay on the State of Parties in 1809, which was published at a time when

the government had taken its stand against the increasing power of the people. After an able analysis of the causes which had led to the most alarming manifestations of public discontent, the Reviewer thus proceeds: —

"Such we humbly conceive to be the course, and the causes, of the evils which we believe to be impending. It is time now to enquire whether there be no remedy. If the whole nation were actually divided into revolutionists and high-monarchy men, we do not see how they could be prevented from fighting, and giving us our chance of a despotism or a tumultuary democracy. Fortunately, however, this is not the case. There is a third party in the nation — small, indeed, in point of numbers, compared with either of the others — and, for this very reason, low, we fear, in present popularity — but essentially powerful from talents and reputation, and calculated to become both popular and authoritative, by the fairness and the firmness of its principles. This is composed of the Whig royalists of England, — men who, without forgetting that all government is from the people, and for the people, are satisfied that the rights and liberties of the people are best maintained by a regulated hereditary monarchy, and a large open aristocracy; and who are as much averse, therefore, from every attempt to undermine the Throne, or to discredit the nobles, as they are indignant at every project to insult or enslave the people. In the better days of the constitution, this party formed almost the whole opposition, and bore no inconsiderable proportion to that of the courtiers. It might be said to have with it, not only the greater part of those who were jealous of the prerogative, but all that great mass of the population which was neutral and indifferent to the issue of the contest. The new-sprung factions, however, have swallowed up almost all this disposable body, and have drawn largely from the ranks of the old constitutionalists. In consequence of this change of circumstances, they can no longer act with any sort of effect, as a separate party; and are far too weak to make head, at the same time, against the overbearing influence of the Crown, and the rising pretensions of the people. It is necessary, therefore, that they should now leave this attitude of stern and defying mediation; and, if they would escape being crushed along with the constitution on the collision of the two hostile bodies, they must identify themselves cordially with the better part of one of them, and thus soothe, ennoble, and control it, by the infusion of their own spirit, and the authority of their own wisdom and experience. Like faithful generals, whose troops have mutinied, they must join the march, and mix with the ranks of the offenders, that they may be enabled to reclaim and repress them, and save both them and themselves from a sure and a shameful destruction. They have no longer strength to overawe or repel either party by a direct and forcible attack; and must work, therefore, by gentle and conciliatory means, upon that which is most dangerous, most flexible, and most capable

of being guided to noble exertions. Like the Sabine women of old, they must throw themselves between their kindred combatants; and stay the fatal and unnatural feud by praises and embraces, and dissuasives of kindness and flattery.

"If this be plainly the general policy which they ought to pursue, there can be little hesitation as to the side to which they must address themselves. To the Court they cannot go; because the Court will not receive them, except as renegadoes and unconditional refugees, — because, coming in that character, they will never be able to infuse any of their wisdom or temperance into the courtiers, — and, finally, because such a measure would irretrievably ruin their characters with the people, and rivet in the public mind that distrust and contempt of all public characters, which is not among the least alarming symptoms of the present revolutionary temper. It remains, therefore, that they must associate themselves with the popular party: and we shall explain, in a few words, both our reasons for urging this coalition, and the extent of the sacrifices by which we think it may be effected.

"The first and the most conspicuous reason for this election is, that it is from the people that the most immediate and irreparable evil is to be apprehended; and that there is no way now left to repress them, except by going among them as friends and advisers, by redressing their real grievances, and undeceiving them as to those that are either incurable or imaginary. Any attempt, now, to bully and intimidate the disaffected, must be as fruitless as it must always have been absurd and unjustifiable; and the prospect is just as desperate, of bringing them back to patience and submission by coldness and alienation—by dignified censures of their extravagance, or contempt of their rashness and folly. Every thing of this sort, now, will only irritate and offend; and unite the party more firmly among themselves, and alienate them more from all the rest of the community, without having the most remote tendency either to weaken or to reclaim them. Even those, therefore, who do not love or care for the people, are now called upon to pacify them, by granting, at least, all that can reasonably be granted; and not only to redress their grievances, but to comply with their desires, in so far as they can be complied with, with less hazard than must evidently arise from disregarding them.

"Another obvious and strong reason for this reconciliation is, that a very great proportion of those who are now enrolled under the banners of democracy, would be very glad to flock to the standard of a legitimate Whig chieftain, if it were once openly unfurled in the cause of the people. While they are treated with a distant haughtiness and suspicion, they will stick to their own leaders; but they would be proud to march under a nobler guidance. And though the more desperate and ambitious and mischievous of the party might oppose such a coalition, all the respectable and temperate would hail it with delight, and submit to a far more efficient

control than can well be anticipated by those who have only seen them when irritated by insult and disdain.

"The last invincible reason for a thorough reconciliation between the Whig royalists and the great body of the people is, that it is a gross solecism and absurdity to suppose, that such a party should exist without being supported by the affections and approbation of the people. The advocates of prerogative have the support of prerogative; and they who rule by corruption have the means of corruption in their hands: — but the friends of national freedom must be recognised by the nation. If the Whigs are not supported by the people, they can have no support; and therefore, if the people are seduced away from them, they must go after them and bring them back; and are no more to be excused for leaving them to be corrupted by demagogues, than they would be for leaving them to be oppressed by tyrants. If a party is to exist at all, therefore, friendly at once to the liberties of the people and the integrity of the monarchy, and holding that liberty is best secured by a monarchical establishment, it is absolutely necessary that it should possess the confidence and attachment of the people; and if it appear at any time to have lost it, the first of all its duties, and the necessary prelude to the discharge of all the rest, is to regain it by every effort consistent with probity and honour.

"Now, it is very true, that the present alienation of the body of the people from the constitutional champions of their freedom, originated in the excesses and delusion of the people themselves; but it is not less true, that the Whig royalists have increased that alienation by the haughtiness of their deportment — by the marked displeasure and contempt with which they have disavowed most of the popular proceedings — and the tone of needless and imprudent distrust and reprobation with which they have treated pretensions that were only partly inadmissible. They have given too much way to the offence which they must naturally have received from the rudeness and irreverence of the terms in which their grievances were stated, and have felt too proud an indignation when they saw vulgar and turbulent men presume to lay their unpurged hands upon the sacred ark of the constitution. They have disdained too much to be associated with coarse coadjutors, even in the good work of resistance and reformation: and have hated too virulently the demagogues who have inflamed the people, and despised too heartily the people who have yielded to so gross a delusion. All this feeling, however, though it may be natural, is undoubtedly both misplaced and imprudent. The people are, upon the whole, both more moral and more intelligent than they ever were in any former period; and therefore, if they are discontented, we may be sure they have cause for discontent; if they have been deluded, we may be satisfied that there is a mixture of reason in the sophistry by which they have been perverted. To know, therefore, how their affections may be regained, and their violence disarmed, it is only necessary to

enquire, what are their reasonable causes of discontent, and what are the demands in which it is right that they should be gratified.

"And here, as a final reason for instantly associating with the more temperate of the popular party, we have no hesitation in saying, that the people appear to us to be clearly in the right in the greater part of the demands they have brought forward; and that their confidence may be won at any time, merely by a cordial and vigorous prosecution of some very laudable objects."*

These statements may be safely left to make their impression on the mind of the reader without any explanatory comments; nor will it be necessary, after what has been said, to add any further observations on the principles of the Edinburgh Review. The Editor has not discharged this part of his duty without a due sense of its importance, and of his inability to do it adequate justice. The only merit to which he presumes to lay claim is that of candour and impartiality. His object has been to give a fair representation of the character and merits of a journal, which, with all its defects, will ever be held in esteem for the beneficial revolution which it has effected in periodical criticism, for its masterly contributions to science and literature, and for the impulse it has given to the human mind. Without approving of all its critical judgments, or of all its views of philosophy and morals, he has endeavoured to vindicate it from some of the charges with which it has been unjustly assailed, and has proved that it deserves the public gratitude for its unshaken devotion to the cause of truth and freedom. The essays contained in these volumes afford satisfactory evidence of the ability and energy which it has manifested in defending popular principles. Nor should it be forgotten, that it fought the battle of the many against the few in times of despondency and peril, and in spite of ignorance, prejudice, and obloquy.

The dearest interests of society are involved in the momentous questions in the discussion of which it has sustained so conspicuous a part; and it is not excessive praise to affirm, that it has displayed in their investigation more genius, learning, taste, judgment, and elegance of composition than any of its contemporaries. Its reputation is associated with all the great measures of public policy which have engaged the attention of philosophers, statesmen, and politicians for the last thirty years,—the Slave Trade, Negro Emancipation, the Penal Laws against the Catholics and Dissenters, and the Misgovernment of Ireland. To these may be added, Reforms in the Church, in Commercial Legislation, in Finance, in the Laws, in the Colonies, and in Education. It has been distinguished by its opposition to every dangerous stretch of power at home, and its honest defence of national independence abroad. The oppressed of every country, of every colour, and of every clime, have been cheered by its sympathy, and aided by its support. The

* Vol. xv. p. 512.

omnipotence of public opinion was not felt, nor thoroughly understood, till the Edinburgh Review came forth to enlighten, animate, and direct the mass of the community. But its chief praise is, that it has powerfully advocated every project by which the minds of the people were to be emancipated, their moral character improved, their physical condition ameliorated, their political rights secured from the invasions of despotism, and their religious privileges from the encroachments of intolerance.

MAURICE CROSS.

Belfast, November, 1832

PART FIRST.

CHARACTERS OF DISTINGUISHED POETS.

SPENSER — SHAKSPEARE — MILTON — DRYDEN — POPE — YOUNG — AND THOMSON.*

THE series of Mr. Stockdale's Eminent Poets commences with Spenser. In going farther back, in point of date, than Johnson, his plan is commendable. Spenser, however antiquated his style, is certainly the earliest of our modern English poets. Surrey and Wyatt, though they are found in the mighty chasm that occurs in our poetical history between Chaucer and Spenser, and though they are sufficiently intelligible to be called modern, are still not sufficiently great to stand as the leaders of a new dynasty. The metaphysical school, who succeeded Spenser and Shakspeare, were unworthy to stand in Johnson's list as the only surviving predecessors of Milton.

The outlines of Spenser's poetical character are pretty faithfully drawn by our author; though, as he duly acknowledges, with ample obligations to the labours of a preceding critic, Warton. The principal circumstance which seems to have debarred Spenser from attaining, as he has certainly approached, the throne of poetical excellence, seems to be the excessive wildness of that machinery which he has adopted from the more extravagant of the Italian schools,— from Ariosto, and not from Tasso. Under this may perhaps be included the fault of his excessive allegory and personification, which associates personified abstract ideas and human beings at the battle as well as the banquet, to the exclusion of even that faint consistency which fable ought to preserve. The form of his stanza has been pronounced by many critics to be tedious and monotonous. Our author confesses that he does not think so; and yet he supposes that it is owing to the shackles of this stanza that the poetry of Spenser has been loaded with so many passages of languor, tautology, and violated grammar. Undoubtedly the stanza of Spenser is less easily constructed in our language than in Italian; but none of the faults of Spenser can be justly attributed to the form of his metre. It is by far the richest and the sweetest of our measures. More definite than blank verse, it admits both of simplicity and magnificence of sound and language. Without the terseness of unvaried rhyme, a measure unfitted to long narration, it is sufficiently uniform to please the ear, and sufficiently various to protract the pleasure. Spenser owes his languid lines merely to the careless taste of an age which set no value on condensed expression. Without disrespect to our truly majestic measure of blank verse, let some of the rich passages in Spenser, or of the Castle of Indolence, be produced,— those passages, especially, of the Fairy Queen, in which Spenser's genius has put forth

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* Stockdale's Lectures on Eminent English Poets.—Vol. xii. p. 62. April, 1808.

a diligent hand; and we shall find, that the melody and the pomp of this measure, while it accords with the humbler, gives dignity to the loftiest conceptions. When the difficulty of any measure is such as to occasion more restraint in overcoming it than effect when it is overcome, that measure may be called a shackle upon genius. But where so much effect is produced, the difficulty that is overcome becomes a triumph to genius; and the restraint operates like those obstacles of oblique pressure in mechanics, which ultimately augment the impetus of projectile bodies, though, for a while, they seemed to oppose it. But, in truth, if we except the unfortunate adoption of extravagantly allegorical machinery, the few imperfections of Spenser seem to arise from his carelessness. The life of man was not sufficient to have wrought up to classical purity so much composition as he has left behind him. Profusion was the fault of his bountiful genius, as prolixity was that of his minor contemporaries. It was the custom to write much on the minutest subject; and though the fertile mind of Spenser precludes that profusion which gives words without ideas, still there is an accumulation of characters, events, speeches, and descriptions, which bewilder the reader, not so much with enchantment, as confusion. The story of the Fairy Queen is more like a succession of triumphal arches than a regular building. We pass on with admiration and delight; but yet both are occasionally cooled by the labyrinthical irregularity of the design. We miss that regular subserviency of minor events and characters to those which are great and important, which constitutes the charm of a perfect story, whether we call it epic, or by any other appellation. The characters are in vain varied from each other by a charming verisimilitude and fidelity to human nature. They are in vain elevated to the most heroic scale of excellence, to produce that entire interest, of which Spenser's genius could not otherwise have failed. Superlative heroes and peerless beauties are crowded upon us in such numbers, that we lose sight of them in the blaze of each other. Had Spenser lived later in the days of poetry, there is every reason to suppose he would have simplified his plan, and condensed the versification of his poem. In a poem of a few hundred pages, the stanza would not seem monotonous; in one amounting to thousands of pages, blank verse itself would at last wear us out.

Let it not be held sacrilegious that these remarks are made on a name so justly revered by Englishmen; on one who, if Chaucer be called the day-star, may certainly be pronounced the sunrise, of our poetry. What shall we think of that romantic poem, which, with all the faults of its structure and careless execution, is still the wonder of a third century, and the fountain from which our great poets of the last age imbibed their inspiration most deeply?

The subject of the next lecture is Shakspeare; of whom it seems difficult to say any thing that has not been said before,— a difficulty which Mr. Stockdale has not overcome. Of Shakspeare's minor poems he thinks unfavourably; an opinion with which the reasonable worshippers of our greatest bard are likely to coincide. All the praise that can be given to those pieces for which his contemporaries gratuitously called him the honey-tongued Shakspeare, is, that they are bad resemblances of the heaviest passages of Spenser. But when we compare the dramatic style of Shakspeare with the descriptive of Spenser, it is then that we are conscious how rich the age of Elizabeth was, which at once contained two such masters, so high in their degree, yet so different in the species of their merit. In Spenser we see, as it were, the painter, in Shakspeare

the statuary, of imitated nature. Instead of the rich and highly-coloured style of Spenser, so peculiarly suited to description, Shakspeare presents us with the simple and complete imitation of naked nature. His style, therefore, (unless where it suits pedantic characters, or complies with his own occasional love of latinising the meaning of words,) is more like the language of life, varying from the ludicrous to the sublime with the characters who address us. Shakspeare is more eminently the poet of nature; he brings nature more palpably before us; his imitation is nearer.

Among other remarks, by no means original, we are told, that invention is one of the grand characteristics of Shakspeare; that no poet ever possessed this faculty in a more fertile or vigorous degree; and we are taught to discriminate between the poetical gifts of invention and imagination. "The inventive poet," says Mr. Stockdale, "signalises himself by combining remoter images. Such a writer is emphatically the Ποιητης, the poet, the maker, almost the creator. Yet,

'What can we reason but from what we know?'"

This question, unanswerable as it seems, he answers by immediately subjoining, "The inventive or creative genius sometimes disdains the walk of man; nay, it will not be limited by the various, the vast, and the apparently unbounded region of nature." He then gives the Weird Sisters, the Airy Dagger, and the Enchanted Island, as the wonderful, the charming, or the striking productions of Shakspeare's *invention;* "the finest assemblage of objects," he continues, "which have obeyed the common and established laws of nature. Human characters, however forcibly or humorously drawn, I beg permission to class with the works of imagination. Caliban and Prospero, according to this distinction, are the boast of Shakspeare's invention; Shylock and Falstaff those of his imagination." All this distinction appears to us superfluous. To divide invention from imagination, seems to be merely dividing the included from the including term. "Imagination," as the most luminous of moral philosophers has described it, "is a complex power*: it includes conception, or simple apprehension, which enables us to form a notion of those former objects of perception, or of knowledge, out of which we are to make a selection; abstraction, which separates the selected materials from the qualities and circumstances which are connected with them in nature; and judgment and taste, which direct their combination. To these powers we may add that particular habit of association to which we give the name of fancy, as it is this which presents to our choice all the different materials which are subservient to the efforts of imagination, and which may therefore be considered as forming the groundwork of poetical genius."

Now, this description of imagination will apply with equal propriety to Shakspeare's Enchanted Island and to his character of Falstaff, leaving no greater merit to his supernatural than his mortal agents. In fact, in point of consummate excellence, the character of Falstaff, though human, is more truly original than that of the monster himself. He found materials for both in the characters of men, and in their reigning superstitions. We may allow poetry to boast, in her own language, of him who "exhausted worlds, and then imagined new;" but, in reality, the new worlds could only be made up of the elements supplied by the old. For Caliban, as well as Falstaff, the materials were ready to his hand. The component parts of the latter abounded in common life. The mate-

* Stewart's Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

rials of the monstrous character abounded in the floating legends of the age; an age, when the names and offices of familiar spirits were as familiar to the ear, and as well believed, as those of human beings;—an age, in which the reigning monarch wrote a treatise on the horns and tail of the devil. To the Rosicrucian philosophy we are indebted for the nominal machinery of the inimitable tragedy of the Tempest; though to Shakspeare we are indebted for all that genius could do with such machinery. Nor is it improbable, that, in some of those legends of Italian fable, from which so many of his plays are derived, he found the very name and offices of his admired Caliban, the witch's bastard by the rape of a demon.*

We are next presented with two whole lectures on Milton. In the first, our lecturer engages to demonstrate, "with almost mathematical precision, that Milton is the first, because the most sublime, of all poets." The steps of Mr. Stockdale's demonstration, however, appear to us more of a legal than mathematical nature. He subpœnas two witnesses to character: Addison is one; Johnson the other. Addison's evidence is wholly favourable; Johnson's is partly unfavourable; but, by skilful cross-questioning, he is made to contradict himself. He then triumphantly exclaims to Johnson, "Out of thine own mouth I will condemn thee!" The glaring inconsistencies of Johnson do indeed convict him; but this, in law, would only set aside the credibility of his evidence. In criticism it is a two-edged argument; it invalidates the faith of his praise as well as of his censure. I object to the sincerity of Dr. Johnson's censure, says the worshipper of Milton, because I can confront them with his praises. And I object to his praises, the assailant of Milton's merit will reply, because I can confront them with his censures. This proves that the merits of poets are to be debated on their own grounds, not *merely* on the critical authorities for or against them.

Let us admit, however, that Milton's greatness is established by such judicial process, — established it surely is by the testimony which every mind alive to the beautiful and the great will bear to his genius; still we object to the truth of our lecturer's text, that Milton is the greatest of all poets; or, to adopt the still wilder words of his declamation, "that all other poets *are babies* compared to him." The claim to this supremacy is founded on Milton's sublimity: and the following definition of sub-

* "I was informed," says Mr. Warton, speaking of an old romance, Aurelio and Isabella, "I was informed, by the late Mr. Collins of Chichester, that Shakspeare's Tempest, for which no reason is yet assigned, was formed on this favourite romance. But although this information has not proved true, on examination, an useful conclusion may be drawn from it, that Shakspeare's story is somewhere to be found in an Italian novel; at least, that the story preceded Shakspeare. Mr. Collins had searched this subject with no less fidelity than judgment and industry; but, his memory failing in his last calamitous indisposition, probably gave me the name of one novel for another. I remember, he added a circumstance, which may lead to a discovery, that the principal character of the romance, answering to Shakspeare's Prospero, had bound a spirit, like Ariel, to obey his call, and perform his services. It was a common pretence of the dealers in occult sciences to have a demon at command. At least, Aurelio, or Orelio, was probably one of the names of this romance, the production and multiplication being the grand object of alchymy. Taken at large, the magical part of the Tempest is founded in that sort of philosophy which was practised by John Dee and his associates, and has been called the Rosicrucian. The name Ariel came from the Talmudistic mysteries, with which the learned Jews had infected this science."—*Warton's History of English Poetry*, vol. iii. p. 473.

limity is subjoined:—" I shall endeavour," says Mr. Stockdale, " to give a comprehensive and clear idea, or definition, of that capital species of writing. To write then with sublimity, is to choose the greatest, or the most splendid, or the most awful, existing or imaginable objects, and to express or display them with a corresponding propriety, force, and majesty of expression." Now, we object, with great deference, to the clearness of this definition; for it tells us no more than that sublime writers choose great subjects, and write with great dignity upon them. Nor can we admit sublimity to be called a *species* of writing, as if it were the epic, the tragic, or the pastoral; it is a quality, not a species of writing; it is a quality, too, which comprehends considerable varieties. The sublime in splendour of conception, in pomp of language, in description of prodigious things, is Milton's. Analogies are unsafe illustrations; but the reader of Milton has probably felt, from his influence, an impression quite analogous to that elevating pleasure which cartoon paintings of the first masters excite. Nothing can exceed, in the quality of sublime, those pictures of the fallen angels in their march over hell, and in their council of Pandemonium. Nothing, in beauty, or sublimity, can exceed (we shall say generally) the first six books of the Paradise Lost. But this excellence, this sublimity, and this beauty which nothing eclipses, does not necessarily eclipse all other excellence. Milton's glory may consist in his subject: that subject has certainly afforded his genius ample room for some of the finest scenes and finest passages of human writing. But the common testimony of mankind permits us to say, without fear of being called presumptuous, that, as a whole, Paradise Lost is deficient in interest; that the last six books do most palpably fall off; and that the warfare between God and his creatures is a constant bar to our sympathy with either victor or vanquished, and annihilates, what is the soul of pleasure in poetical narration, curiosity. These expressions are not Johnsonian cavils; they contain *all* that can be fairly said in objection to Milton, and nothing more. How much still remains to excite our veneration! Allowing, therefore, to Milton every praise that can be pronounced on those passages, and even entire books, where the agents of his poem, his speeches, and conception of character, are sublime; still this quality of sublimity does not absorb all excellence.. The state of fancy excited by it, is not, by its nature, suited for long possession of the human mind. — It keeps its faculties on the utmost stretch; it is of itself but a single quality: and though it does not exist in Milton, any more than in other great poets, unconnected with the beautiful and pathetic; yet, if it be assumed as the ground of Milton's claim to supremacy in poetry, we are entitled to say, that a certain union of other constituent qualities of a poet are, collectively, paramount to its greatness. The opinion which, we make bold to say, the world at large maintain, is, that the aggregate of all the poetical qualities of Shakspeare is superior to that of Milton's — including his sublimity and every other claim to admiration.

If the epic poet be sublime, so is our great tragedian. We do not pretend to divide the general term sublime with unnecessary distinction; yet, when we say that Shakspeare is sublime, we must speak more of his merit in the aggregate than judging him by detached passages. His sublimity is more strong than brilliant; it lies more in effect than in perceptible manner. It is like listening to an orator, of whose powers of persuasion we are not fully conscious till he has finished his discourse. When we peruse the dialogue of his dramas, so much of the familiar

occurs in his language, that the triumph over our sympathies seems to be obtained without an effort of the poet. The design of Milton to dazzle us with splendid and overwhelm us with great images, is always obvious. Milton has all the ensigns and regalia of sovereign genius; Shakspeare all the power and prerogative. Let us recur to an instance of the sublime in Shakspeare, and it will illustrate this distinction. Take the scene of Macbeth relating his murder of Duncan to Lady Macbeth,—"There's one did laugh in his sleep, and one cried, Murder!" The dialogue commencing with this line has no passage, which, taken separately, and read to a person unacquainted with the play, would seem a specimen of sublime composition; yet the effect of the whole, when we read the play, is sublime; it is like something more than human language. If the terrors of the tragic muse be not sublime, by what name shall we call them? Let us again suppose it possible to find a person susceptible of poetical impressions, who had not read Milton, and we should have no difficulty, in every page, to quote such sentences as would strike him, though read unconnectedly, with wonder and delight; such lines as the description of Satan and his peers,—"He spoke, and to confirm his words outflew millions of flaming swords," &c. But let such a reader, even warm and fresh from the bright wonders of Paradise Lost, submit his feelings to the influence of some of Shakspeare's best tragedies; and the result, we think, will be, that, judging by collective effect, by creation of character, by vivid imitation of nature, and by combined and general tests of genius, he will award the superiority to Shakspeare.

Nor would this judgment be formed exclusively on the creative originality of our dramatic master. Without reference to their comparative power over the passions of terror and pity, let the testimony of mankind decide which of the two poets is richer in those sentences which contain as it were the pith, the quintessence, the condensed originality, which might serve for the texts of volumes, for the motto of every situation in life. Is the poet from whom it has been emphatically said, "that philosophers might learn wisdom, and courtiers politeness," is this poet one of the babies compared to Milton?

In the praise of Milton's minor poems our author is deservedly enthusiastic. There is one piece which has escaped his eulogy, and which, from being omitted in many editions of Milton's works, is less popularly known than its extreme majesty and picturesque beauty seem to deserve: we allude to the speech of the Genius of the Wood in the Arcades.

"For know, by lot from Jove, I am the Power
Of this fair wood, and live in oaken bower,
To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove
With ringlets quaint, and wanton windings wove;
And all my plants I save from nightly ill
Of noisome winds and blasting vapours chill,
And from the boughs brush off the evil dew,
And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,
Or what the cross dire-looking planet smites,
Or hurtful worm with canker'd venom bites:
When evening grey doth rise, I fetch my round
Over the mount and all this hallow'd ground,
And early, ere the odorous breath of morn
Awakes the slumbering leaves, or tassell'd horn
Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,
Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
With puissant words and murmurs made to bless;

But else, in deep of night, when drowsiness
Hath lock'd up mortal sense, then listen I
To the celestial Syrens' harmony,
That sit upon the nine enfolded spheres,
And sing to those that hold the fatal sheers,
And turn the adamantine spindle round,
On which the fate of gods and men is wound:
Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,
To lull the daughters of Necessity,
And keep unsteady Nature to her law,
And the low world in measured motion draw
After the heavenly tune, which none may hear
Of human mould with gross unpurged ear;" &c. &c.

The rich and diversified merits of Dryden form, as our author justly remarks, not an abrupt descent from the sublimity of Milton. Whether we recollect him as a lyric, a narrative, dramatic, political, or satirical poet, or as a translator, the name of Dryden summons up recollections of excellence. The union of critical with poetical power; the vigour and the hale manliness of expression which for ever look fresh in his sentences and lines; the majestic force without harshness, and the perfect and downright English of Dryden's style, entitle him to this great succession, and perhaps rank him in merit the fourth after Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, of English poets. If, indeed, we could forget Otway, there would be no need of qualifying this opinion: but the pathos of Otway, after all, as it stands single in competition with the infinite varieties of Dryden's merit, allows us rather to suggest than to dwell upon a doubt of their comparative rank. Nor is there to be found, in all the treasures of biography, a life more interesting than Dryden's. In the midst of all its alloy, his genius commands our admiration, as his character, though degraded by several imperfections, attaches our regard. The life of Otway, imperfectly as it is given, exhibits a mind of finer sensibility, sinking under adversity. Dryden's teems with interest and with instruction. While the few and venial spots which poverty left upon his fame may afford a lesson to the wisest, and a caution to the weakest; his unassuming modesty, his fortitude, his industry, and his high spirit, will teach no less improving an example. His creative powers are less by far than those of his great poetical predecessors; yet he enlarged the empire of poetry. He applied it with grace and effect to subjects which had never before been thought susceptible of its beauties; and he did so, without either raising his subjects to an undue importance, or degrading his poetry by bringing it down to meet his subject. Polemical religion and politics, the least obviously adapted for such embellishments, came from his hands with attractions unknown before or since. The constitutional blemishes of his Hind and Panther form, it is true, one exception to this merit; but even in that production there are nervous passages; and his Religio Laici more than atones for all the defects of its sister poem. The criticism of Pope is but an echo of his critical poetry. Indeed, in his critical canons, he reminds us of the primitive lawgivers, who passed their ordonnances in verse, and whose ordonnances have continued to be obeyed when reduced by others to familiar prose. For, common as the truths which he uttered are now become, we owe them traditionally to him. We find them, no doubt, even in Blair; but Dryden first promulged them.

As a political poet, he is without a rival, and without a second. Before we censure the scriptural obscurity of Absalom and Achitophel, let us

recollect the scriptural knowledge of the age in which he wrote, when every Bible name and fact was familiar to every reader; let us recollect, also, the fine advantage which his genius drew from masking his satire behind this allegorical parallel. As the poetical criticism in general, so the poetical satire in particular, of Dryden, was the prototype of Pope's. The Dunciad prolonged, without magnifying, the triumph of talent over dulness. We should quote our lecturer's characteristic remarks on Dryden's translation as the best specimen, in our apprehension, of his notice of this poet, were there not already commentaries on those performances more valuable than ever were written on translated poetry. These are found in Dryden's own prefaces and dedications. A more perfect essay on translation, or a finer discrimination of the ancient poets, does not exist, than in his preface to a miscellany of translations from Theocritus, Lucretius, and Horace. In the variety of his translations, unequal as they are in merit, a complete preference is still difficult, from the number of rival beauties; but those of Horace are perhaps his masterpieces. The enviable sensations of a fortunate individual have been well described by an eloquent writer, who, descending into the new-discovered ruins of Pompeii, found the Roman senator in his robes, whose body had been preserved with almost the semblance of life for fifteen hundred years. There is a pleasure analogous to this in perusing some passages of Dryden's Horace; but something more than dead antiquity is there restored. We have not the dust, but the soul of Horace; no affected adaptation of ancient expressions to modern usages; nothing of that smart dressing out of an ancient statue in the modern costume, which so much disfigures Pope's, and, it must be owned also, many of Dryden's translations. The language of antiquity is changed, but not its simplicity. How much the nature and sprightliness of the "*Vides ut alta stet nive Candidum*," is preserved in the ode which concludes with these lines:—

"The appointed hour of promised bliss,
The pleasing whisper in the dark,
The half-unwilling willing kiss,
The laugh that guides thee to the mark,
When the kind nymph would coyness feign,
And hides but to be found again —
These, these are joys the gods for youth ordain."

Nor has lyric poetry, if we except the memorable ode from Hafiz by Sir William Jones, found a happier transfusion from one language into another, than in many lines of the 29th Ode of the Second Book.

"Fortune, that, with malicious joy,
Does man her slave oppress,
Proud of his office to destroy,
Is seldom pleased to bless;
Still various, and inconstant still,
But with an inclination to be ill,
Promotes, degrades, delights in strife,
And makes a lottery of life:
I can enjoy her while she 's kind;
But when she dances in the wind,
And shakes her wings, and will not stay,
I puff the prostitute away;
The little or the much she gave is quietly resign'd," &c. &c.

Dryden is one of those poets on whose faults and inequalities it is fair to dwell, as a matter of truth; but, for the interests and promotion of

good taste, and for the sake of warning to young writers, it is not so necessary. The reason is, that, though a poet trained by discipline, and formed upon rules, he is still a most natural writer; his faults are those of carelessness, not of bad taste: hence they are obvious, and not alluringly dangerous, like the systematic affectations of poets who err from inherent or acquired corruption. If we except his partiality to rhyming tragedies, there seems no distinguishable fault in his poetical creed. When minds of this kind are impelled by want, or betrayed by impatience, to publish their crudities and errors, however numerous, they are not apt to assume the shape of imposing errors. It is the *dulcia vitia* of system, and laborious polish, which are apt to perplex and betray an inexperienced taste. But the chaff and the corn of Dryden are easily separable. Where he offends, he offends as boldly as he pleases. Equivocal passages may be found; but ambiguity is as seldom his fault in merit as in meaning. But, with all its high endowments, the poetical mind of Dryden was far short of even limited and frail human perfection. He wants one of the chief characteristics of genius, a tender and pathetic mind. The power (as Johnson observes) which predominated in his intellectual operations was rather strong reason than quick sensibility. On all occasions that were presented, he rather studied than felt; and produced sentiments, not such as nature enforces, but meditation supplies. With the simple and elemental passions, as they spring separately in the mind, he seems not much acquainted; and seldom describes them but as they are complicated by the various relations of society, and confused in the tumults and agitations of life. What he says of love may contribute to the explanation of his character: —

> "Love various minds does variously inspire;
> It stirs in gentle bosoms gentle fire,
> Like that of incense on the altar laid:
> But raging flames tempestuous souls invade;
> A fire which every windy passion blows,
> With pride it mounts, or with revenge it glows."

Dryden's was not one of the gentle bosoms: Love as it subsists in itself, but with no tendency but to the person loved, and wishing only for correspondent kindness; such love as shuts out all other interest — the love of the golden age, was too soft and subtile to put his faculties in motion. He hardly conceived it but in its turbulent effervescence with some other desires — when it was inflamed by rivalry, or obstructed by difficulties — when it invigorated ambition, or exasperated revenge.

Pope is naturally introduced as the successor of Dryden. His character is thus given by our lecturer: —

"In comparing and estimating different poets of the first class, we ought to observe something like mathematical accuracy, — we ought to weigh the whole aggregate of their respective merits. In making comparative estimates, with this justice to Pope, we should find in him so many, and so apparently incompatible excellences, that we should deem the possible and eternal privation of his works as great a single loss as could happen to the republic of letters. Of what a melancholy and irreparable chasm, among the poetical ornaments of England, would feeling hearts be sensible, if the Abelard to Eloisa could be lost! This poem is quite unrivalled in the ancient and modern world: it consists of three hundred and sixty lines, and every line is superlatively elegant, harmonious, and pathetic. This observation is not applicable to any other poem of such a length. But this is not its only glorious singularity. The hopes, the fears, the wishes, the raptures, and the agonies of love, were never so naturally and forcibly impressed on the soul by any other eloquence, if we except Rousseau."

Pope is an excellent poet; but this is not a way to lecture on his merits. This is the common-place language, which every miss at a boarding-school could utter, if she had the boldness to acknowledge having read Eloisa to Abelard. Yet we have sought in vain for a more rational and discriminate eulogy on the favourite poet of the last century. The poem of Eloisa does indeed glow with the finer fires of passion and of feeling. It is his great work; but he is much indebted to Ovid for many of its beauties. There is much in Sappho to Phaon of which Eloisa's warmest and most enchanting passages remind us. Had Mr. Stockdale told us that Eloisa to Abelard is the finest of English love-epistles, we should not make any exception to the expression; had he called it the finest of all epistles ancient or modern, we should have at least understood him; but what he means by saying, it is absolutely unrivalled in ancient or modern times, is by no means so easily comprehended. Is it superior to the fourth book of Virgil's Æneid? Is it superior to every thing of every kind in the poetical treasures of Greece and Rome? Were a parallel started between this epistle and some of the finest passages in antiquity, we have no doubt that Mr. Stockdale would decide with as little hesitation, and probably with as much justice, as he devotes Homer to contempt, and all his pedantic admirers. But a modest man is slow in giving, and a reasonable man in believing, these decisions on comparison of old and new writings, especially against the ancients. We shall not therefore believe, either that Homer is inferior to Milton, or that Pope's Eloisa is superior to every thing ancient, merely on Mr. Stockdale's assertion, till we ascertain, with better certainty, that he is competent to draw the comparison. To estimate Pope's value as a poet "by the melancholy chasm, of which feeling hearts would be sensible, if Eloisa's epistle were lost," we confess, exceeds our computing faculty. Our lecturer may have clearer notions on the subject; but there is something in the supposition which perplexes and confuses us. If the feeling hearts recollected the poem, then it could not be lost; and if it was totally lost and forgotten, then they could not be aware that there was any thing so good to lament for.

We are told that Pope unites those excellences which are apparently incompatible. Now, superlative terms should always be used with caution, but, above all, when speaking of such a poet as Pope. He is one to be measured by no mean standard. What is good in his poetical character is greatly good; so that, to match one acknowledged quality, that which we bring to prove his uniting with it another great quality should be striking indeed. Our lecturer has, as usual, left those apparently incompatible excellences undefined. Correctness, which distinguishes Pope as one great excellence, is united with his shrewdness, his wit, and his common sense. There is nothing in these qualities apparently incompatible with correctness. The poetical quality which we should least expect to see united with correctness, is that daring luxuriance of fancy or association which distinguishes Spenser or Shakspeare, and which is found even in Dryden in no scanty degree. But neither this romantic fancy, nor extreme pathos, nor sublimity of the very first order, are discoverable in Pope.

In the midst of this chapter, however unwilling we may be to submit to the universal authority of Dr. Johnson, yet it is quite refreshing to meet with passages of his better sense and more dispassionate decisions, which our author quotes. The sentences of Johnson stand indeed with peculiar advantage in this insulated situation; and Mr. Stockdale is en-

titled to the same sort of gratitude which we feel to a dull landlord who has invited us to dine with an interesting visitor. In fact, after the one has bewildered us, the other puts us right. It is not easy to add to what Johnson has said; still less should we presume to take away from the truly admirable summary of Pope's character which he has drawn. But when we assent to the opinions of a superior mind, we generally find its utterance so conveyed, that we can assent in a qualified manner, where assent is, on the whole, due, and yet find room for some partial distinction of our own. "If Pope is not a poet," says Johnson, "where is poetry to be found?" This is certainly true; for though the forte of Pope be neither pathos, sublimity, nor daring originality, yet, that he moves the affections, approaches to majesty of thought, and possesses much of his own creation, who shall deny? The indiscriminate praise of our author is, that Pope united apparently inconsistent excellences. Dr. Johnson touches off his picture more rationally, by saying, that he had, in proportions very nicely suited to each other, all the qualities which constitute genius. The excellences of Pope were adjusted by proportion to each other, and not incompatible qualities. "He had invention," Dr. Johnson continues, "by which new trains of ideas are formed, and new scenes of imagery displayed, as in the Rape of the Lock; or extrinsic embellishments and illustrations are connected with a known subject, as in the Essay on Criticism." The adaptation of his Rosicrucian machinery in the Rape of the Lock, is indeed an inventive and happy creation, in the limited sense of the word to which all poetical creation must be restricted. There is no finer gem than this poem in all the *lighter* treasures of English fancy. Compared with any other mock-heroic in our language, it shines in pure supremacy for elegance, completeness, point, and playfulness. It is an epic poem in that delightful miniature which diverts us by its mimicry of greatness, and yet astonishes by the beauty of its parts and the fairy brightness of its ornaments. In its kind it is matchless; but still it is but mock-heroic, and depends, in some measure, for effect on a ludicrous reference in our own minds to the veritable heroics whose solemnity it so wittily affects. His aërial puppets of divinity, — his sylphs and gnomes; and his puppet heroes and heroines, — the beaux and belles of high life, required rather a subtle than a strong hand to guide them through the mazes of poetry. Among inventive poets, this single poem will place him high. But if our language contains any true heroic creations of fancy, the agents of Spenser's and Milton's machinery will always claim a superior dignity to their Lilliputian counterfeits.

"He had imagination," Johnson observes, "which enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in his Eloisa, his Windsor Forest, and his Ethic Epistles." It is true that Pope's imagination could convey the forms of nature; yet many poets have looked upon nature much less through a medium than Pope, and have seen her and painted her in less artificial circumstances. The landscapes of Pope are either such as the tourist would sketch within ten miles of London; or, if he attempted more enchanting scenery, he gives, by his vague and general epithets, only the picture of a picture; he writes more by rote than by conception, like a man who saw nature through the medium of the classics, and not with the naked eye. In vain we shall search his Pastorals, or Windsor Forest, for such a landscape as surrounds the Castle of Indolence, the Bower of Eden, or the inimitable Hermitage of Beattie.

Without defining the picturesque, we all feel that it is a charm in poetry

seldom applicable to Pope. In the knowledge and description of refined life, Pope is the mirror of his times. He saw through human character as it rose in the living manners of his age, with the eye of a judge and a satirist; and he must be fond of exceptions, who should say that such a satirist did not understand human nature. Yet, when we use the trite phrase of Shakspeare understanding human nature, we mean something greatly more extensive than when we apply the same phrase to Pope. From the writings of the former, we learn the secrets of the human heart, as it subsists in all ages, independent of the form and pressure of the times. From Pope we learn its foibles and peculiarities in the 18th century. We have men and women described by Shakspeare; by Pope we have the ladies and gentlemen of England. Whatever distinctions of mental expression and physiognomy the latter delineates, we see those distinctions, whether leaning to vice or virtue, originate partly in nature, but still more in the artificial state of society. The standard of his ridicule and morality is for ever connected with fashion and polite life. Amidst all his wit, it has been the feeling of many in reading him, that we miss the venerable simplicity of the poet in the smartness of the gentleman. To this effect the tune of his versification certainly contributes. Without entering into an enquiry whether his practice of invariably closing up the sense completely within the couplet is right or wrong, it is clear that Pope has made the melody of his general measure as perfect as it can be made by exactness: whether a slight return to negligence might not be preferable to the very acmé of smoothness which he has chosen, is a subject which, interesting as it is, we will not now encroach on the reader's patience by examining.

The Epistle of Eloisa evinces his knowledge of one passion, and his feeling of it, to have been genuine. It is possibly a fair inference from this, that his poetical sympathy could have followed, with the same success, any other of the leading passions or their combinations, and exhibited a picture of the human heart, (in Epic poetry, for instance,) under the influence of other emotions and situations, with the same bold originality as he has portrayed Eloisa. We state this as a fair doubt, from reverence to so great a name, and because the boundaries of a short article make us distrust our power of exactly justifying a contradiction. But, with deference, we state our opinion, that Pope, from his writings, appears to know human nature more as a satirist than a man of feeling; that none of his writings (least of all, his Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady) demonstrate power in the pathetic; that a gay life, of high polish and conversation, while it brightened his wit, and pointed his shrewdness, probably diminished the reflective energy of his mind, and made him more observant of foibles than of passions, of manners than of nature in the abstract. There is one sacred passion which nature has ordained to be independent of fashion and artificial manners, for its eternal vehemence. Hence, the poet who may have been limited in observing other secrets of the human bosom, by the greatest bane to originality, an intercourse with the narrow limits of the fashionable world, may, even with that disadvantage, observe and paint the omnipotence of love in all its greatness and simplicity.

From the higher region of poetry, our lecturer seems sensible that he is coming down a considerable step when he proceeds to Young. His general character of him will be acknowledged to be just.

"Nature had bestowed on Young an exuberant, vigorous, and original genius. It was boundless in its versatility; it was inexhaustible in its resources. But its

uncommon and splendid qualities were darkened and dishonoured by their opposite characteristics. He has left us many proofs that he could be extremely injudicious; his taste was extremely vitiated. He often tires us with what I can term no better than poetical tricks or legerdemain. He is apt to prolong a forcible and shining thought to its debility and its death, by an Ovidian redundance and puerility; and he seems to have exerted the whole stretch and grasp of his mind to unite remote images, and thoughts which could never have been associated but by the most elaborate affectation. By an overheated fancy breaking through every pale of judgment, he sometimes loses himself in fustian, when he imagines that he has attained sublimity."

In one respect, our author puts us in mind of a rower in a boat; he looks one way and proceeds another. In Young we find him treating of Pope, and in Thomson looking back upon Young. A Johnson or a Croft are ever and anon present, to receive some castigation; and are seemingly thrown in his way, that he may have the pleasure of kicking them out of it. His remarks on Young are, nevertheless, in general judicious, except where he praises the minor poems of that author. The prose of Young is clearly and happily described by the frequent manliness of its originality, and its grotesque and whimsical decorations.

With higher genius, and with a milder spirit of religion, Thomson adorned the contemporary age of Young, and drew from that, as from the succeeding, a deeper admiration. Whether the object of poetry be to please, or to mend the heart, either definition will suit the muse of Thomson. His inspiration awakens, and almost creates anew, that moral sense which polished life, and the petty agitations of artificial society, are most apt to obliterate, viz. the sense of beauty in external nature; a principle on which so much innocence and happiness depend. Other poets have shown us choice scenes of nature; Thomson leads us abroad to look at her whole horizon, and all her vicissitudes. He gives us (we might almost say) a separate and new enthusiasm for the beauties of creation, which, in other poets, we only feel by occasions, as the scenery is connected with some transient action or event. When we consider the nature of this moral charm in the author of the Seasons, we find a reason for his popularity exceeding that of all other poets, even those who are not his inferiors in genius. The narrative and dramatic poets, who appeal to the more tumultuous and palpable passions, depend on curiosity for the delight we find in them. When the story is told, or the drama wound up, it is difficult to bring our curiosity fresh to their perusal. But the Seasons present to us imitations of nature, which the eye delights not merely to visit, but to rest and to muse upon. In the placid and still nature of the objects, we have time to gather a multitude of associations. There is scarce a reader of Thomson, whose mind will not furnish recollections in proof of this. The features of nature in Thomson's description are without vagueness or indistinctness, but still general, and applicable by association to the particular scenery which is freshest and pleasantest in the actual remembrance of every individual among the millions who read him. All descriptive poetry, it is true, possesses, to a certain degree, this charm of general applicability to individual association; but it could be easily proved that an event and an agent, by being more particular themselves, lose, in generality of association, what they gain to the reader in curiosity and interest. This will not prove that Thomson's poetry yields more intense delight in the present perusal, than others of high merit; but, by the calmness and permanence of the pleasure, it accounts for our recurring to it so often.

Amidst the profuse and noble praise which Johnson has lavished upon

this poet, Mr. Stockdale seems highly offended that he should have ventured to hint at a blemish. Yet, surely, for the sake of taste, and, above all, for the sake of preserving poetical style free from the most dangerous, because the most fascinating fault, florid and excessive ornament, it may be said, with all reverence to Thomson, that he is frequently too exuberant, and fills the ear rather than the mind. Many of his epithets are barren blossoms — gaudy, but unprofitable. Yet, if faults are to be found, they ought also to be distingushed. The faults of Thomson, whether useless epithets or occasional redundance, are not great defects in his poetry. He never provokes us, like Young, with disgust at fustian or nonsense. When Thomson sacrifices a thought to false taste, he only dresses the victim in flowers, and leads it on in procession. Young butchers it outright, and dissects it on the altar. On the subject of Thomson's minor poems, of which some are exquisitely beautiful, and others of unequal merit, we should perhaps do no justice either to Mr. Stockdale's or our own thoughts by entering in the narrow bounds of a short paper; but no admirer of Thomson can forbear to mention his Castle of Indolence — a poem in which there appears an immaculate simplicity, which he had not attained in his Seasons. In the first part, at least, he has realised the idea of perfect poetry. Of the superior purity of Thomson's style in this enchanting production, Mr. Stockdale seems not to be aware. The inequality of the second part of the Castle of Indolence is known and acknowledged; yet one cause of this is perhaps the finished perfection of the first. It was enough; it needed no second part. It resembles the well-known air of pastoral simplicity, to which all the skill of an inventive master could not furnish a second Yet in the second part, as we have it, what inimitable stanzas are found! The poetry of the Castle of Indolence can only be described in poetry.

SKETCHES OF THE OLD ENGLISH DRAMATISTS.

MARLOW. — SHAKSPEARE. — BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER. — MASSINGER. — BEN JONSON. — MIDDLETON. — MARSTON. — DECKER. — CHAPMAN. — WEBSTER. — FORD. — SHIRLEY. — MILTON. — DRYDEN. — OTWAY. — SOUTHERN. — ADDISON. — DR. JOHNSON. — MOORE, AND LILLO. *

In the history of a nation, the progress and vicissitudes of its literature are but too frequently disregarded. The crowning of kings, and the winning of battles, are recorded with chronological accuracy, and the resources of the country are laid open. The eye of the reader is dazzled with the splendour of courts and the array of armies; the rise and fall of parties — the trial and condemnation of state criminals — the alternations of power and disgrace, are explained to very weariness. But of the quiet conquests of learning there is small account. The philosopher must live in his own page, the poet in his verse; for the national chronicles are almost mute regarding them. The historian's bloody catalogue is not made up of units; but deals only with great assemblages of men — armies, fleets, and senates: the king is the only "*one*" included in the story; but

* Beddoe's Bride's Tragedy, and Knowles's Virginius. — Vol. xxxviii. p. 177. February, 1823.

of him, be he a cipher or a tyrant, we are told in a way to satisfy the most extravagant desires of loyalty.

There is in this, we think, an undue preponderance — a preference of show to substance — of might to right. There is at least as much importance to be attached to the acquisition of "Paradise Lost," or "Lear," as to the gaining of an ordinary victory. Accordingly, *we*, profiting by the historian's lapse, and in order to do those ingenious persons (the poets and philosophers) justice, assume the right of tracing, from time to time, *their* histories upon our pages, and of discussing, with something of historic candour, their good qualities and defects.

In contemplating the great scene of literature, the Muses are, beyond doubt, one of the brightest groups; and, among them, those of the *drama* stand out pre-eminent. To quit allegory — it comes more quickly home to the bosoms of men; it is linked more closely to their interests and desires, detailing matters of daily life, and treating, in almost colloquial phrase, of ordinary passions. It is as a double-sided mirror, wherein men see themselves reflected, with all their agreeable pomp and circumstance, but freed of that rough husk of vulgarity which might tempt them to quarrel with their likeness; while the sins of their fellows are stripped and made plain, and they themselves portrayed with unerring and tremendous fidelity.

Certainly dramatic poetry is more quick and decisive in its effects than poetry of any other kind; and this arises partly from its nature, and partly from the circumstances under which it is made public. In the imagination of a person visiting the theatre, there is a predisposition to receive strong impressions. The toil of the day is over, the spirits are exhilarated, and the nerves rendered susceptible by a consciousness of coming enjoyment. All the fences and guards that a man assumes in matters of business or controversy are laid aside. Even the little caution with which he takes up a book (for we have now got a lurking notion that authors are not infallible) is forgotten: he casts off his care and his prudence, and sets both the past and future at defiance when he enters the limits of a theatre. It is impossible for a person unacquainted with dramatic representation to understand the effect produced on a mixed mass of the people when a striking sentiment is uttered by a popular actor. The conviction is instantaneous. Hundreds of stormy voices are awakened, the spirit of every individual is in arms, and a thousand faces are lighted up, which a moment before seemed calm and powerless;— and this impression is not so transient as may be thought. It is carried home, and nursed till it ripens. It is a germ which blossoms out into patriotism, or runs up rank into prejudice or passion. It is intellectual property, honestly acquired; and yet debateable ground, on which disputes may arise, and battles are to be fought hereafter.

Men are often amused, and sometimes instructed, by books. But a tragedy is a great moral lesson, read to two senses at once; and the eye and the ear are both held in alliance to retain the impression which the actor has produced. A narrative poem is perhaps more tempting in its shape than a play, and may fix the attention more deeply in the closet; but it is addressed to a more limited class, and necessarily affects our sympathies less forcibly; for a drama is an embodying of the present, while an epic is only a shadow of the past. We listen, in one case, to a mere relation of facts; but, in the other, the ruin of centuries is swept away, and time annihilated, and we stand face to face with "grey Antiquity." We see and hear things which we thought had departed for ever;

but they are (or seem to be) here again — in stature, in gesture, in habit, the same. We become as it were one of a crowd that has vanished; we mix with departed sages and heroes, and breathe the air of Athens, and Cressy, and Agincourt. Men who have been raised to the stars, and whom we have known but by the light of their renown, are made plain to our senses; they stand before us, flesh and blood like ourselves. We are apt to deny our sympathy to old events, when it is asked by the mere historian of the times; but when the mimic scene is unfolded before us, we are hurried into the living tumult, without the power (or even wish) to resist.

Schlegel, in his acute and learned lectures on "Dramatic Art and Literature," enquires, "*What is dramatic?*" A definition is seldom an easy thing. Although we can understand what is called dramatic writing, it may nevertheless be difficult to define it correctly. It certainly does not consist merely in its shape of dialogue; because dialogue may be, and often is, essentially *un*dramatic. Speeches may be shaped, and separated, and allotted, and they may be raised or lowered in expression, as the king, or the merchant, or the beggar, is presented, yet the hue of the author's mind shall pervade them all. Such characters are *not* dramatic; they have no verisimilitude; they are like puppets worked with wires, the mechanism of the brain, but little more. They may startle our admiration, or tease our curiosity, by the ingenuity of the workmanship; but we have no faith in them, and they stimulate us to nothing. In Shakspeare (but he stands in this, as in every thing else, alone), we never see the prejudice of the author peeping out and interfering, — a mistake and an anachronism in the scene. He is the only one who ever had strength enough to cast off the slough of his egotism, and courage enough to lay his vanities aside, and array with the pure light of an independent intellect the most airy creations of the brain. Like the prince in the Arabian fiction, he leaves one shape for another and another, animating each and all by turns; not carrying the complexion, or tone, or diseases of the first, into the body of the second; and yet superior even to that ingenious metempsychosist, whose original love, if we remember aright, remained unaltered through all the changes that he underwent in story.

It is assuredly difficult, and argues more than common disinterestedness, to set aside, of our own accord, our right to be heard, and to become the organ and mouthpiece of a variety of men. To invest ourselves for a time with the prejudices, and even with the very speech, of statesmen and soldiers, kings and counsellors, knaves, idiots, friars, and the like, seems like a gratuitous vexation of the intellect; and yet it must be done. We must give up our privilege to dictate, and lose the opportunity of saying infinitely better things than the parties concerned would utter, if we wish for eminent success in the drama. This is offensive to our self-love; and the truth is, that a vain man can never be a good dramatist. He must *forget himself* before he can do justice to others. We have heard it insisted, that this is neither possible nor desirable. But that it is possible, Shakspeare is a brilliant testimony; and that it is desirable, is equally certain, and, we apprehend, not very difficult of proof. A character (king or peasant) must speak like himself, or like another person, or like no person whomsoever: — which style is the best, we leave to the understanding of the reader. It is true that, without much of that particular faculty which we are inclined to call "dramatic," some authors have contrived to portray one or two characters with success; but these have been generally mere *beaux idéals*, — mere copies or modifications of themselves. Indeed,

we have found, on a strict scrutiny, that their opinions might always be seen darkening one character, and their animal spirits gilding another; and that, whether didactic, or disputatious, or jocose, the fluctuation of their own spirit has been manifest through all the shiftings and disguises of their tale.

Schlegel, in reply to his own question of "What is dramatic?" says, that it does not consist merely in dialogue, but that it is necessary that such dialogue should operate a change in the minds of the persons represented. If by this he means that the character itself should be wrought upon and change, we think that this may be desirable; but the *nature* of the drama is a thing different from the result which it ought to arrive at. This assertion of Schlegel is therefore almost like saying, that argument is not sound, (or rather, that it is not argument at all,) unless it shall produce conviction. In our own literature, at least, it is certain that we often find the personages at the end of the play in precisely the same state of mind as at the commencement. We make a play a succession and change of *events*, and not a change of sentiment. The sentiment of the hearer is indeed, if possible, to be wrought upon, but not necessarily that of any one character of the drama. The character, in fact, is frequently developed in the first scene, and we have nothing afterwards to learn except as to what accidents befall it. If the German critic means to say (for he is not very clear), that the tone of the several speeches in a play should be dependent on each other — that the first should give rise to the second, the second to the third, and so on, we entirely agree with him: for the bright spirit of dialogue can only be struck out by collision; and if the speech, the answer, and the replication, were mere independent and insulated sayings, each character would utter a series of monologues, and no more.

Shakspeare (as in the case of Macbeth and others) sometimes makes his tragedy an absolute piece of biography, and allows his characters to unfold themselves gradually, act by act: he does not, in truth, often bring forward a ready-made villain, whom we may know at a glance; but we have a map of the march and progress of crime or passion through the human heart: our sympathies are not assaulted or taken by surprise, but we move forward, step by step, with the hero of the story, until he perishes before our eyes. This is undoubtedly the perfection of the drama; but it exists in its weakness as well as in its strength; and even in Shakspeare, Iago is much the same person in the fifth act as he is in the first scene, and Richard undergoes little, if any, alteration.

If we were driven to a definition, we should say, that a good drama is "a story told by action and dialogue, where the spirit and style of the speeches allotted to each character are well distinguished from the others, and are true to that particular character and to nature." It must involve a story (or event), or it will not have the strength and stature of a drama; for that is not a collection of scenes loosely hung together without object, but a gradual detail of one or more facts in a regular and natural way. It must have action, or it cannot be fit for representation; and dialogue, or it would be but narration. The speeches must possess character and distinction, without which a play would be monotonous, and like the voice of a single instrument breathed through different tubes of one diameter: and that those speeches should be true to the characters to which they are assigned and (as a consequence) to nature, must be presumed, until we can show that nature is wrong, or can find a brighter model to imitate.

The earliest dramatic amusements of modern times (they were common

to Italy, and Spain, and England,) were of a religious nature, and with us passed under the name of "Mysteries." In these, which were stories taken from the Bible and Testament, the characters were sustained by monks, or boys attached to ecclesiastical establishments; and, indeed, the literary part of the Mysteries (such as it is) must have sprung from the same source.

Much discussion has occurred among our industrious and inquisitive brethren in learning, as to whether our drama is of foreign or English growth. Something plausible may no doubt be urged on each side of the question; but we must rest on circumstantial proof at last; and, after all, the discovery would scarcely compensate for the pains that must be bestowed on the enquiry, for the subject itself is not very important to the interests even of the drama.

Some derive our dramatic literature at once from the tragedies of the ancient Greeks; some from the comparatively modern entertainments which the Jews and early Christians were accustomed to exhibit at Constantinople (Byzantium) and elsewhere; others say that it originated at fairs in the ingenuity of the itinerant dealers, who thus exerted their wits to draw people and purchasers together; while the rest (without referring to this origin) contend only that it is of pure English growth, and has no connection with any that we have mentioned, nor even with the Mysteries of Italy or Spain. Schlegel himself is, if we remember correctly, of this last opinion.

Now, we can scarcely suppose that our earlier writers were indebted to the classic Grecian models; for the "Mysteries" have been traced back as far as the twelfth century; and Chaucer, in the fourteenth century, speaks of "plays of miracles;" at which time we are not aware that the Greek dramatists were known in England. But there is a better reason still against this supposed derivation, which is, that the early English performances bear no resemblance whatever to the tragedies of the Greeks. The latter are fine and polished entertainments, discussing matters of daily life, or immortalising events in their own history; while the former are meagre didactic matters, taken solely from sacred history, and destitute of the chorus, which forms so striking a feature in the character of the Grecian plays. Had our forefathers imitated Sophocles, or Euripides, or Æschylus, it is but fair to suppose that they would have imitated them entirely; for the taste of the nation was not at the point to suggest *selections* from their style, nor to justify any deviation from their successful system. We must therefore conclude, that the ancient Grecians had little to do (nothing directly) with the birth of our English drama.

As to the opinion that it began in mimic and buffoonery at fairs, we cannot understand why, if this was the case, the subjects should be of so serious a cast. It is not reasonable to suppose that the wandering merchants of the time would strive to attract purchasers by laying before them some signal instance of God's vengeance. If they had mimicked any thing, it would have been the manners or follies of the time, the gesture or the gait of individuals, or things that were in themselves obviously susceptible of mirth, and readily to be understood by the spectators. But we see nothing of this in the earliest specimens of the English dramatic writers; and without this we cannot well accede to the opinions of Warton or Schlegel, and think that our drama had no connexion with that of foreign countries. In the first place, our English Mysteries were essentially like those of Gregory Nazianzen and the modern Italians. We had intercourse with Italy and Constantinople; and it is known that the stories

of Boccaccio and his countrymen had been brought into England in the time of Chaucer.

If there had not been so decided a resemblance, in point of subject, between the "Mysteries" of England and the sacred dramas of Italy and modern Greece, we should have felt inclined to adopt the opinion of Schlegel. It is known that the same ingenious discoveries have been made in different parts of the world which had no acquaintance with each other; and it would have been but equitable to have given the English credit for a drama of their own invention. But, to say the truth, the earliest specimens of English plays do not look like inventions; they are at once too complete for originals, and too rude to be considered as copies from the polished dramas of Sophocles and his contemporaries. The first attempt at dramatic writing would naturally be in the form of a monodrame, or a simple colloquy, and not a drama with all its principal and subordinate parts illustrating a fact in history. It is said, indeed, that the Mysteries were composed by the monks, for the purpose of supplanting more vulgar entertainments of a similar nature; yet the fact of no such entertainments having come down to us, may well excite some scepticism; for the person capable of inventing a drama would also, we should think, be able to record it. It is true, that the most ancient entertainment at Naples is Punch, who has descended, by tradition only, from father to son, and still keeps his place of popularity, in defiance both of improvement and innovation. But Punch was not the origin of the Italian drama; nor would the fact of his having been so, or of his resemblance to our fair mimicry, alter the question as to the invention of the English "Mysteries." After all, however, the matter is not important, and scarcely worth the very small discussion which we have bestowed upon it.

The "*Moralities*," which followed, grew out of the old "Mystery," and were the natural offspring of such a parent. They were mere embodyings of the vices and virtues; and though dressed up after a barbarous fashion, made some approach to the models of the ancient Greeks; at least in the titles of their *dramatis personæ*. "Death, — Kindred, — Strength, — Discretion," and others, for instance, which occur in the old Morality of "Everyman," came nearer to the personages in the Prometheus of Æschylus than the nature of the "Mysteries" would allow; and in the Morality of "Lusty Juventus," the persons of "Knowledge, — Good Councell, — Sathan the Devyll," and others, explain at once the nature of their offices, and the entertainment they are likely to afford. These compositions (especially the Morality called "Hycke-Scorner") possess occasional gleams of dramatic spirit; but, generally speaking, they have little of that quality beyond what is discoverable in the romances and narrative poems of the same period.

The first regular English comedy, "Gammer Gurton's Needle," in every sense a very remarkable performance, is said to have been written in the year 1551; and if that statement be correct, the first English tragedy, "Ferrex and Porrex," which was the joint composition of Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and Thomas Norton, was written in the same year. Our business is not now with the comedy. With regard to the latter drama, it is remarkable rather for its even style and negative merits, than for any one brilliant or sterling quality. It has none of the rudeness of the dramas which preceded and followed it, but stands by itself, an elegant instance of mediocrity in writing. Without extravagance or flagrant error — without ribaldry, or any of the offensive trash that disgraced those days, it is nevertheless mournfully deficient in spirit and dramatic cha-

racter. The hue of the authors' minds pervades the whole like a gloom. When Pope praised this tragedy for "the propriety of sentiments, and gravity of style," &c. "so essential to tragedy," and which, he says, "Shakspeare himself perpetually neglected, or little understood," he proves to us nothing but that he did not understand dramatic writing. Even Milton (and we say this very reluctantly) seems to have had an imperfect idea of true tragedy, when he calls the Greek writers "unequalled," and proposes them as models, in preference to our own great and incomparable poet. We have little to object to the "propriety" of Lord Buckhurst's sentiments, and nothing to the "gravity" of his style. These things are very good, no doubt; but we have nothing else. There is no character — no variety, which is the soul of dramatic writing. What Lord Buckhurst says might as well be said in a narrative or didactic poem,— in a sermon, or an essay. But in a play, we want true and vivid portraits; we want the life and spirit of natural dialogue; we want "gravity of style" occasionally, but we also want fancy, and even folly: we want passion in all its shapes, and madness in its many moods, and virtue and valour,— not dressed up in allegory, nor tamed down to precept, but true and living examples of each, with all the varieties and inflections of human nature,— not too good for us to profit by, nor too bad for us to dread. Now, we have little of this in "Ferrex and Porrex." The play is sterile in character, and, with all its good sense, is a dead and dull monotony. The following is one of the most favourable passages; but it will nevertheless afford a fair specimen of the style in which the whole is written. Hermon (a parasite) is addressing the king.

> ——"If the fear of Gods, and secret grudge
> Of Nature's law, repining at the fact,
> Withhold your courage from so great attempt,
> Know ye that lust of kingdoms hath no law,
> *The Gods do bear, and well allow in kings*
> *The things that they abhor in rascal routes.*
> When kings on slender quarrels run to wars,
> And then, in cruel and unkindly wise,
> Commend thefts, rapes, murder of innocents,
> The spoil of towns, ruins of mighty realms,
> Think you such princes do suppose themselves
> Subject to laws of kind, and fear of Gods?
> Murders and violent thefts in private men
> Are heinous crimes, and full of foul reproach;
> Yet no offence, and deck'd with glorious name
> Of noble conquests in the hands of kings."—Act ii. sc. 1.

We have taken no liberty with this very edifying counsel, except that of altering the ancient spelling. The doctrine requires as little assistance.

After Lord Sackville followed *Edwards*, who, in 1571, wrote "The Comedy of Damon and Pythias." It has, notwithstanding its title, some things of tragedy in it; but the serious parts are nearly worthless. The style is rude and bad enough, and the play is filled with anachronisms and inconsistencies; but there is an attempt at character in one or two of the persons of the drama, which serves in some small measure to redeem it. Aristippus is an instance of a philosopher turned courtier; and Carisophus is a specimen of the parasite plant, which we can easily suppose flourished and multiplied as readily at the foot of Ætna, as on the banks of the Seine or the Thames, or on the shores of the sea of Archangel. About the same time with Edwards lived and wrote Thomas *Preston*, the author of "Cambises king of Persia." This tragedy is remarkable only for its having been referred to, as is supposed, by Shakspeare in "Henry the Fourth."

The " vein " of Cambises, however, is but a sorry vein ; and is more dull than extravagant. It would probably long since have been forgotten, but for Falstaff's allusion. *Whetstone*, the author of Promos and Cassandra, is scarcely worth a mention, unless it be that Shakspeare has borrowed his subject of " Measure for Measure " from him ; neither is *Kyd*, who wrote " Soliman and Perseda," and " The Spanish Tragedy." We say this on the supposition that some other was the author of the scene in the latter play, where Hieronimo is discovered mad. There is in that scene, indeed, a wild and stern grief, painted with fearful strength, which we must not altogether pass over. The following short extract is powerful and fine.

The Painter enters.

" *Paint.* God bless you, sir.
Hier. Wherefore ? why, thou scornful villain ?
How, where, or by what means should I be blest ?
Isab. What would'st thou have, good fellow ?
Paint. Justice, madam.
Hier. Oh ! ambitious beggar, would'st thou have that
That lives not in the world ?
Why, all the undelved mines cannot buy
An ounce of Justice, 'tis a jewel so inestimable.
I tell thee, God hath engross'd all justice in his hands,
And there is none but what comes from him.
Paint. Oh ! then I see that God must right me for
My murder'd son.
Hier. How, was thy son murder'd ?
Paint. Ay, sir : no man did hold a son so dear.
Hier. What ! not as thine ? that's a lie
As massy as the earth : I had a son
Whose least unvalued hair did weigh
A thousand of thy sons, and he was murder'd.
Paint. Alas ! sir, I had no more but he.
Hier. Nor I, nor I : but this same one of mine
Was worth a legion. But all is one ; Pedro,
Jaques, go in a doors, Isabella, go,
And this good fellow here, and I
Will range this hideous orchard up and down
Like two she lions reaved of our young."

Besides these, there are some others who may be said to have flourished before the time of Shakspeare — *Wilmot*, who wrote " Tancred and Gismonde " — *Greene*, the author of " James the Fourth " — *Legge*, who is said to have written " Richard the Third " — the celebrated John *Lily* the Euphuist — George *Peele*, who wrote " David and Bethsabe," and " Mahomet and Hiron," and some other dramas ; and last, but not least, Christopher Marlow. These authors, with the exception of Peele and Marlow (for Lilly's plays can scarcely be considered within the limit of our subject) may be passed over without further mention. The lines of Peele are sweet and flowing, but they have little imagination and no strength ; and he is without a notion of dialogue. He would have written pastorals perhaps smoothly and pleasantly, but the passions were altogether above him. One of his plays, " Mahomet and Hiron," is probably the source from which ancient Pistol has derived a portion of his learning. David and Bethsabe reminds us of the Old Mysteries : its style, however, is different, and it has some lines that have undoubtedly great beauty. In Bethsabe's apostrophe to the air, she says —

" Deck thyself in loose robes,
And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes " —

which is delicacy itself; nor can the following lines in the same play (describing a fountain) be denied the merit of being extremely graceful:—

> "The brim let be embraced with golden curls
> Of moss that sleeps with sounds the waters make,
> With joy to feed the fount with their recourse:
> Let all the grass that beautifies her bower
> Bear manna every morn instead of dew;
> Or let the dew be sweeter far than that
> That hangs like chains of pearl on Hermon hill."

But *Marlow* was undoubtedly the greatest tragic writer that preceded Shakspeare. The spirit of extravagance seems to have dwelt in his brain, and to have imped him on to the most extraordinary feats: but his muse had a fiery wing, and bore him over the dark and unhallowed depths of his subject in a strong and untiring flight. This poet is less remarkable for his insight into human character, than for his rich and gloomy imagination, and his great powers of diction,—for whether stately, or terrible, or tender, he excels in all. His "mighty line" was famous in his own time, and cannot be denied even now: yet he could stoop from the heights of a lawless fancy, or the dignity of solemn declamation, to words of the softest witchery. He certainly loved to wander from the common track, and dash at once into peril and mystery; and this daring it was which led him naturally to his sublimity and extravagance. Unfortunately Marlow is never content with doing a little, nor even with doing enough; but he fills the cup of horror till it overflows. There is a striking instance of this in his tragedy of "Lust's Dominion," which seems written from a desire to throw off a tormenting load of animal spirits. There is a perpetual spurning at restraints, a warring with reason and probability, throughout the whole of the play. Eleazar, the Moor, is a mad savage, who should have been shut up in a cage, and the queen, his paramour, with him; and the whole dialogue (though there are some strong well-sustained passages) is as unequal and turbulent as the characters.

Of all the plays of Marlow, "Faustus" is the finest, and "Edward the Second" perhaps the most equal. The "Jew of Malta" we cannot admire, (though there is in it certainly the first hint of Shylock); and Tamburlaine, generally speaking, is either fustian or frenzy. However, the poet's idea of the horses of the sun —

> "That blow the morning from their nostrils,"

is magnificent, and his description of Tamburlaine's person

> "(Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear
> Old Atlas' burden"—)

recalls, not unpleasantly, to our mind the description of the great "second spirit" of Milton.* "Faustus" is the story of a learned man who sells himself to the devil, on condition of having unlimited power on earth for twenty-four years; and Mephostophilis (a spirit) is given to him as a slave. These two worthies pass from place to place, enjoying themselves in feastings and love, and triumphs of various kinds; and, by the aid of Lucifer, they beat priests and abuse the pope to his face, and commit similar enormities, in defiance of "*maledicats*" and other formidable weapons of church construction. There are many single lines and phrases in this play which might be selected as incontestable evidence that Marlow was,

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* "With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies."

in felicity of thought and strength of expression, second only to Shakspeare himself. (As a dramatist, however, he is inferior to others.) Some of his turns of thought are even like those of our matchless poet; as when he speaks of

———" unwedded maids
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the queen of love;"

or of a temple

" That *threats* the stars with her aspiring top;"

and where he refers to a man who has an amiable soul,

" If sin by custom grow not into nature" —

and many others. But Faustus's death is the most appalling thing in the play. It is difficult, however, to give the reader an idea of it by a brief extract—he must read it with its " pomp and circumstance " about it. Faustus is to die at twelve, and the clock has already struck eleven. He groans forth his last speech, which begins thus —

" O Faustus!
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually.
Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven,
That Time may cease, and Midnight never come!
Fair Nature's eye, rise — rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year — a month — a week — a natural day —
That Faustus may repent, and save his soul," &c.

And now, to pass from the terrible to the gentle, nothing can be more soft than the lines which he addresses to the Vision of Helen, whom he requires to pass before him when he is in search of a mistress. He is smitten at once by her excelling beauty, and thus he speaks: —

" Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium!—
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss —
Her lips suck forth my soul . . . .
Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee
Instead of Troy shall Wittenburg be sack'd,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest.
— Oh! thou art fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter,
When he appear'd to hapless Semele;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azure arms,
And none but thou shall be my paramour."—

Following Marlow, but far outshining him and all others in the vigour and variety of his mighty intellect, arose the first of all poets, whether in the East or West — SHAKSPEARE. He had, it is true, many contemporaries, whose names have since become famous,— men who slept for a time in undisturbed obscurity, and who are at last brought forward to illustrate the fashion of their time, and to give bright evidence of its just renown. Yet there is not one worthy of being raised to a comparison with Shakspeare himself. One had a lofty fancy, another a deep flow of melodious verse, another a profound reach of thought; a fourth caught well the mere manners of the age, while others would lash its vices or laud its

proud deeds, in verse worthy of the acts which they recorded; but Shakspeare surpassed them all. In the race of fame he was foremost, and alone. He was, beyond all doubt or competition, the first writer of his age or nation. He illuminated the land in which he lived, like a constellation. There were, as we have said, other bright aspects, which cast a glory upon the world of letters; but *he alone* had that *radiating* intellect which extended all ways, and penetrated all things, scattering the darkness of ignorance that rested on his age, while it invigorated its spirit and bettered the heart. He was witty, and humorous, and tender, and lofty, and airy, and profound, beyond all men who have lived before or since. He had that particular and eminent faculty, which no other tragic writer perhaps ever possessed, of divesting his subject altogether of himself. He developed the characters of men, but never intruded himself amongst them. He fashioned figures of all colours and shapes and sizes; but he did not put the stamp of egotism upon them, nor breathe over each the sickly hue of his own opinion. They were fresh and strong, beautiful or grotesque, as occasion asked,—or they were blended and compounded of different metals, to suit the various uses of human life; and thus cast, he sent them forth amongst mankind to take their chance for immortality.

The contemporaries of Shakspeare were great and remarkable men. They had winged imaginations, and made lofty flights. They saw above, below, or around; but they had not the taste or discrimination which he possessed, nor the same extensive vision. They drew correctly and vividly for particular aspects, while he towered above his subject, and surveyed it on all sides, from "top to toe." If some saw farther than others, they were dazzled at the riches before them, and grasped hastily, and with little care. They were perplexed with that variety which he made subservient to the general effect. They painted a portrait — or two — or three only, as though afraid of confusion. He, on the other hand, managed and marshalled all. His characters lie like strata of earth, one under another; or, to use his own expression, "matched in mouth like bells, — each under each." We need only look to the plays of Falstaff, where there are wits and rogues and simpletons of a dozen shades, — Falstaff, Hal, Poins, Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, Hostess, Shallow, Silence, Slender,— to say nothing of those rich recruits, equal only to a civil war. Now, no one else has done this, and it must be presumed that none have been able to do it; Marlow, Marston, Webster, Decker, Jonson, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher — a strong phalanx, yet none have proved themselves competent to so difficult a task.

It has been well said, that it is not so much in one faculty that Shakspeare excelled his fellows, as in that wondrous combination of talent, which has made him, beyond controversy, eminent above all.* He was as universal as the light, and had riches countless. The Greek dramatists are poor in the comparison. The gloom of Fate hung over their tragedies, and they spoke by the oracle. They have indeed too much of the monotony of their skies; but our poet, while he had the brightness of the summer months, was as various as the April season, and as fickle and fantastic as May.

It is idle to say that the characters of writers cannot be discovered from their works. There is sure to be some betrayal, — (Shakspeare is a wonderful and single exception in his dramatic works, but he has written

* See Mr. Hazlitt's Essay on the Characters of Shakspeare.

others) — there is always some mark of vanity, or narrow bigotry, or intolerant pride, when either of these vices darken or contract the poet's heart: there is some moment when he who is querulous will complain, and he who is misanthropic will pour out his hate; but, passing by the dramas, in which, however, there is no symptom of any personal failings, there is nothing to be found in all his lyrical writings, save only a little repining; and this the malice of his stars may well excuse. The poets and wits of modern times would, we suspect, spurn at the servitude which Shakspeare wore out with patience. But he, rich as he was in active faculty, possessed also the passive virtue of endurance — the philosophy which enabled him to meet misfortune, and to bear up against the accidents of poverty and of the time. It is to the eternal honour of Lord Southampton, that he could distinguish in some measure the worth of our matchless poet, and that he had generosity enough to honour and reward it. So much has been written and said on Shakspeare, that we will not add further to the enormities of criticism. He breathes like a giant under the loads of rubbish which his pigmy critics and commentators have flung upon him. One good editor, with a reasonable knowledge of the manners and diction of the times, would do the world a service by casting aside nine-tenths of the barren dissertation that has been wasted on the subject, and which now remains, like a *caput mortuum*, weighing down the better text of our greatest poet.

After Shakspeare, *Beaumont* and *Fletcher* have altogether the highest claims to consideration. For, though Ben Jonson was more eminent in some respects, and Massinger better in others, they were, as serious dramatic poets, decidedly superior to both. It is difficult to separate Beaumont from Fletcher; especially as all the plays wherein the former had a share are not certainly known. Beaumont is said to have had the better judgment (to have "brought the ballast of judgment"), and Fletcher the livelier and more prolific fancy; but as the latter was the sole author of the "Faithful Shepherdess," "Valentinian," "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife," and "The Two Noble Kinsmen*," besides being concerned jointly with Beaumont in some of the most serious plays which pass under their joint names, he is entitled on the whole to the greatest share of our admiration. An excellent critic has said of Fletcher, that he was "mistrustful of nature." We think rather that he was careless of her. He lets his Muse run riot too often. There is no symptom of timidity about him, (if that be meant): he never stands on the verge of a deep thought, curbing his wit for propriety's sake. On the contrary, he seems often not to know where to stop. Hence it is that his style becomes dilated, and has sometimes an appearance of effeminacy.

If we may believe the portraits of Fletcher, there was something flushed and sanguine in his personal complexion. His eye had a fiery and eager look; his hair inclined to red; and his whole appearance is restless, and, without being heavy, is plethoric. And his verse is like himself. It is flushed and full of animal spirit. It has as much of this as Marlow's had; but there is not the same extravagance, and scarcely the same power, which is to be found in the verse of the elder dramatist. Fletcher, however, had a great deal of humour, and a great deal of sprightliness. There is a buoyancy in his language that is never percepti-

* "The Two Noble Kinsmen" is said to have been written by Fletcher and *Shakspeare*; and the early part of the play certainly betrays marks of the great master hand, or else an imitation so exquisite, as to cause our regret that it was not more frequently attempted.

ble in Massinger, nor even in the shrewder scenes of Ben Jonson;—but he had not a wit like Shakspeare, nor a tithe of his ethereal fancy. There is always something *worldly* in Fletcher, and the other poets of his time, which interferes with their airest abstractions, and drags down the wings of their Muse. We see it in the "Witch" of Middleton, in the "Faithful Shepherdess" of Fletcher and others; whereas we do not feel it in "The Tempest," nor in "Macbeth," disturbing our delusion; and Oberon and Titania and her crew, even when they mix with the "rude mechanicals,"

"Who work for bread upon Athenian stalls,"

remain to us a golden dream. They meet by moonlight upon the haunted shores of Athens, to make sport with human creatures, to discuss their tiny jealousies, to submit even to the thraldom of an earthly passion; but they still keep up their elfin state, from first to last, unsoiled by any touch of mortality.

Before we part with Fletcher, we shall give the reader a passage from his tragedy of "Philaster," that will illustrate, more than any thing we can say, both his merits and defects. Bellario (a girl in disguise) addresses the king of Sicily, on behalf of his daughter (Arethusa), who has just been married clandestinely to Philaster. The young couple come in as masquers; and thus the boy-girl intercedes:—

"Right royal sir, I should
Sing you an epithalamium of these lovers,
But having lost my best airs with my fortunes,
And wanting a celestial harp to strike
This blessed union on, thus in glad story
I give you all. These two fair cedar branches,
The noblest of the mountain, where they grew
Straightest and tallest, under whose still shades
The worthier beasts have made their layers, and slept
Free from the Sirian star, and the fell thunder-stroke,
Free from the clouds, when they were big with humour,
And deliver'd
In thousand spouts their issues to the earth:—
Oh! there was none but silent Quiet there;
Till never pleased Fortune shot up shrubs,
Base under-brambles, to divorce these branches;
And for a while they did so:—
And now a gentle gale hath blown again,
And made these branches meet and twine together,
Never to be divided.—The God, that sings
His holy numbers over marriage beds,
Hath knit their noble hearts, and here they stand
Your children, mighty king; and I have done."

With regard to *Massinger*, there can be no doubt, we think, that he was decidedly inferior to Fletcher as a poet; but that he was a more equal writer is very possible, and he had perhaps as great a share of the mere dramatic faculty. His verse has been celebrated for its flow, we believe, by Dr. Ferriar; but we cannot, we confess, perceive much beauty in it. It is not rugged and harsh, but it wants music nevertheless; it runs in a tolerably regular current, but it has seldom or never any felicitous modulations. Massinger himself has not much of the fluctuation of genius. We would not be understood to say that carelessness is the necessary concomitant of talent, but merely that Massinger rarely rises much beyond the level on which he sets out. He is less accessible to passion than Fletcher and others, and is not often either very elevated or very pro-

found. His imagination does not soar, like Marlow's, nor penetrate, like the dark subtle power of Webster. He has strength, however, and sometimes great majesty of diction. He builds up a character to a stately height, although he does not often endow it with the turns and vacillations of humanity. "Sforza" is the best which occurs to us at this moment, and is in some measure an exception to our opinion. We do not see any thing improbable in his conduct, more than is justified by the irregularities of human nature. His wild admiration and fierce injunctions are sufficiently consistent; and the way in which he rises upon us, from being the slave of a woman's beauty to the height of a hero and philosopher, has always attracted our deep regard. His return, and his remorse, too, are all in character; and though Massinger's forte is by no means the pathetic, the death of Sforza is full of pathos. He sighs forth his breath thus—

> "Yet I will not die raging; for, alas!
> My whole life was a frenzy.—
> Bury me with Marcelia,
> And let our epitaphs be"——

and here death cuts short his saying; but the unfinished accents are more touching than the most elaborate and highly strained completion.

We think of *Ben Jonson*, almost as a matter of course, when we name Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger. He was not equal to his companions in tragedy; but he was superior to them, and perhaps to almost all others, in his terse, shrewd, sterling, vigorous, comic scenes. He had a faculty between wit and humour (but more nearly allied to the latter), which has not been surpassed. His strokes were sometimes as subtle as Shakspeare's; but his arrowy wit was not feathered. His humour was scarcely so broad and obvious as Fletcher's; but it was more searching, and equally true. His tragedies were inferior to his comedies. He had a learned eye, and set down good things from the book; but he relies upon facts (if we may so speak) instead of Nature, and they do not provide for all the dilemmas to which his heroes are reduced.

Of *Middleton* it may be said, that he had a high imagination, and was an observer of manners and character; and that his verse was rich, being studded with figures and bright conceits. His play of the "Witch" is supposed by Stevens to have preceded Macbeth; and, if so, there can be no doubt but that Shakspeare made use of it. The relative merits of his witches and those of Shakspeare have already been decided by Mr. Charles Lamb to our satisfaction. As a play, we prefer, on the whole, our author's "Women Beware of Women." Leontio's speech, when he is returning home to his young wife, is a fine compliment to marriage.

Marston was more of a satirist than a dramatic writer. He was harsh in his style, and cynical and sceptical in his ideas of human nature. Nevertheless he was a deep and bold thinker; and he might have filled the office of a court jester, with all the privileges of a motley, for he could whip a folly well. He held up the mirror to vice, but seldom or never to virtue. He had little imagination, and less dilatation, but brings his ideas at once to a point. A fool or a braggart he could paint well, or a bitter wit: but he does little else; for his villains are smeared over, and his good people have no marks of distinction upon them. Yet there are a few touches of strange pathos in the midst of his satires; but they arise from the depth of the sentiment, rather than from the situation of things, or from any strength of passion in the speaker, either of love or pity or

despair. Marston appears to us like a man who, having outlived the hopes of a turbulent youth, has learned nothing but that evil is a great principle of human nature, and mingles sparingly the tenderness of past recollections with the bitter consciousness of existing ill.

Decker had a better notion of character than most of his contemporaries; but he had not the poignancy of Marston, and scarcely the imagination of Middleton, and fell short of the extravagant power and towering style of Marlow. Perhaps, however, he had more of the qualities of a good dramatist than either. He understood the vacillations of the human mind. His men and women did not march to the end of the drama without turning to the right or to the left; but they gave themselves up to nature and their passions, and let us pleasantly into some of the secrets and inconsistencies of the actual world. His portraits of Mattheo and Bellafront (particularly the former), of Friscobaldo and Hypolito, are admirable. He is almost the only writer (even in his great time) who permits circumstances to have their full effect upon persons, and to turn them from the path on which they set out. He did not torture facts to suit a preconceived character; but varied the character according to events. He knew that to be inconsistent and to change was natural to man (and woman), and acted accordingly. As a specimen of the style of Decker, the reader may take the following extract. The Duke (of Milan) and his Doctor and servants are waiting for the revival of Infelicia, who has been thrown, by opiates, into a sleep.

"*Duke.* Uncurtain her.
Softly, sweet doctor . . . . You call'd
For music, did you not? Oh, ho! it speaks,
It speaks. Watch, sirs, her waking; note those sands.
Doctor, sit down. A dukedom that should weigh
Mine own twice down, being put into one scale,
And that fond desperate boy Hypolito
Making the weight up, should not (at my hands)
Buy her i' the other, were her state more light
Than hers who makes a dowry up with alms.
Doctor, — I'll starve her on the Apennine,
Ere he shall marry her. I must confess
Hypolito is nobly born; a man,
Did not mine enemy's blood boil in his veins.
Servant. She wakes, my lord.
Duke. Look, Doctor Benedict.
I charge ye, on your lives, maintain for truth
Whate'er the Doctor or myself aver.
Infel. Oh! God, — what fearful dreams!
Servant. Lady!
Duke. Girl!
Why, Infelicia! — how is 't now? ha, — speak!
Infel. I'm well. What makes this doctor here? — I'm well.
Duke. Thou wert not so, e'en now. Sickness' pale hand
Laid hold on thee, e'en in the dead of feasting;
And when a cup, crown'd with thy lover's health,
Had touch'd thy lips, a sensible cold dew
Stood on thy cheeks, as if that Death had wept
To see such beauty alter'd."

Chapman (the translator of Homer) was a grave and solid writer; but he did not possess much skill in tragedy; and, in his dramas at least, did not show the same poetic power as some of his rivals. Nevertheless he was a fine pedant, a stately builder of verse. In his best-known tragedy, "Bussy

d'Ambois," his hero will receive no human help when dying, but says —

> " Prop me, true sword, as thou hast ever done.
> The equal thought I bear of life and death
> Shall make me faint on no side: I am up
> Here like a Roman statue: I will stand
> Till Death hath made me marble. Oh! my fame,
> Live, in despite of murder. Take thy wings,
> And haste thee where the grey-eyed Morn perfumes
> Her rosy chariot with Sabæan spices;
> Fly where the Evening, from Iberian vales,
> Takes on her swarthy shoulders Hecaté
> Crown'd with a grove of oaks:
> And tell them all that D'Ambois now is hasting
> To the eternal dwellers."

Webster was altogether of a different stamp. He was an unequal writer; full of a gloomy power, but with touches of profound sentiment and the deepest pathos. His imagination rioted upon the grave, and frenzy and murder and 'loathed Melancholy' were in his dreams. A common calamity was beneath him, and ordinary vengeance was too trivial for his Muse. His pen distilled blood; and he was familiar with the hospital and the charnel-house, and racked his brain to outvie the horrors of both. His visions were not of heaven, nor of the air; but they came, dusky and earthy, from the tomb; and the madhouse emptied its cells to do justice to the closing of his fearful stories. There are few passages, except in Shakspeare, which have so deep a sentiment as the following. Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, has caused his sister (the Duchess of Malfy) to be murdered by Bosola, his creature. They are standing by the dead body.

> " *Bosol.* Fix your eye here.
> *Fer.* Constantly.
> *Bosol.* Do you not weep? —
> Other sins only speak: Murther cries out:
> The element of water moistens the earth;
> But blood flies upwards, and bedews the heavens.
> *Fer.* Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle. She died young!
> *Bosol.* I think not so: her infelicity
> Seem'd to have years too many.
> *Fer.* She and I were twins:
> And should I die this instant, I had lived
> Her time to a minute."

We would not be supposed to assert that this writer was without his faults. On the contrary, he had several: — he had a too gloomy brain, a distempered taste; he was sometimes harsh, and sometimes dull; but he had great sentiment, and not unfrequently great vigour of expression. He was like Marlow, with this difference — that as Marlow's imagination was soaring, so, on the other hand, was his penetrating and profound. The one rose to the stars, the other plunged to the centre; equally distant from the bare common-places of the earth, they sought for thoughts and images in clouds and depths, and arrived, by different means, at the same great end. *Rowley* and *Field* are respectable names of this period; but, as they generally wrote in conjunction with others, we will not attempt to give them an independent reputation. We must not forget, however, that the former was the author of " The Witch of Edmonton," and bore for some time the credit of " The Parliament of Love."

Ford is sufficiently peculiar in his talent, as well as his style, to call for a separate mention. His principal play of "'Tis Pity She's a Whore," betrays great powers of pathos, and much sweetness of versification; but they should not have been wasted on such a subject. We are not persons to put the Tragic Muse in fetters, nor to imprison her within very circumscribed limits; but there are subjects (be they fact or fiction) which are nauseous to all except distempered minds. There can be no good gained by running counter to the tastes and opinions of *all* society. There is no truth elicited, no moral enforced; and the boundaries of human knowledge can scarcely be said to be enlarged by anatomising monstrous deformities, or expatiating upon the hideous anomalies of the species. Ford has not much strength or knowledge of character; nor has he much depth of sentiment, except in portraying the passion of love. In that, however, he excels almost all his contemporaries. He is remarkable, also, for his pathetic powers; yet scarcely for poetry, although his verse is generally sweet and tender. Some parts of the "Broken Heart" are as finely written as Fletcher, and Penthea herself (the true heroine, after all — a pale passion-flower) exquisitely drawn. The scene, however, in "'Tis Pity She's a Whore," where Giovanoni murders Annabella, is the finest thing that Ford has done; and there he will stand a comparison with any one, except Shakspeare himself. *Tourneur* was the author of one or two tragedies of exceeding merit. He belonged to the age of Fletcher, and Jonson, and Decker, and was worthy of it: but his faculty, though excellent in itself, had not such a peculiar cast as to call for a separate mention. He deserved more, however, than the couplet with which one of his contemporaries has libelled his memory:—

"His fame unto that pitch was only raised,
As not to be despised, nor over-praised."

The "*Revenger's*" and "*Atheist's Tragedies*" should have saved him from this.

Shirley was a writer of about the same calibre as Ford, but with less pathos. And he was, moreover, the last of that bright line of poets whose glory has run thus far into the future, and must last as long as passion, and profound thought, and fancy, and imagination, and wit, shall continue to be honoured. There may be a change of fashions, and revolutions of power; but the empire of intellect will always remain the same. There is a lofty stability in genius, a splendour in a learned renown, which no clouds can obscure or extinguish. The politician and his victories may pass away, and the discoveries in science be eclipsed; but the search of the poet and the philosopher is for immutable TRUTH, and their fame will be, like their object, immortal.

We have now done with the ancients. We have endeavoured to trace, as well as we could, their individual likenesses: but they had also a general character, which belonged to their age, — a pervading resemblance, in which their own peculiar distinctions were merged and lost. They were true English writers, unlatinised. They were not translators of French idioms, nor borrowers (without acknowledgment) of Roman thoughts. Their minds were not of exotic growth, nor their labours fashioned after a foreign model. Yet they were indebted to story and fable, to science and art — and they had a tincture of learning; but it was mixed with the bloom of fresh inspiration, and subdued to the purposes of original poetry. It was not the staple, the commodity upon which these writers traded; but was blended, gracefully and usefully, with their own homebred diction and original thought.

During the protectorate of Cromwell, the drama lay in a state of torpidity. Whatever intellect the time possessed was exhausted in tirades and discussions, religious and political, where cunning, and violence, and narrow bigotry, alternately predominated. The gloom of an ignorant fanaticism lay heavy on the state, and oppressed it; and humour and fancy were put to flight, or sought shelter with the wandering cavaliers of the period. The spirit of the people was bent to arms. They fought for liberty or the crowned cause, as interest or opinion swayed them, while literature suffered in the contest. Milton, the greatest name of that age, was the grandest of the poets, but he had strictly no dramatic faculty. He himself speaks throughout the whole of "Samson Agonistes," —throughout all "Paradise Lost," — all "Comus." His own great spirit shone through the story, whatever it might be; and whatever the character, his own arguments and his own opinions were brought out and arranged in lucid order. His talent was essentially epic, not dramatic; and it was because the former prevailed, and not the latter, that we are indebted for the greatest poem that the world has ever seen.

After the restoration of the second Charles, the Drama raised its head, but evidently with little of its former character. It had lost its old inspiration, caught directly from the bright smile of Nature. It had none of that fine audacity which prompted the utterance of so many truths; none of that proud imagination which carried the poet's thoughts to so high a station. But it drew in a noisy, and meagre, and monotonous stream of verse, through artificial conduit and French strainers, which fevered and fretted for a time, but, in the end, impoverished and reduced the strength and stature of the English Drama.

Dryden is the principal name of this period; and he was foremost to overturn the system of his forefathers, and substitute the French style in its stead. He vaunts, if we remember rightly, in one of his prefaces, of adding new words to our native tongue; and he certainly injured (as well as served) the cause of literature, by sanctioning by his example the prevalent taste of his time. The Restoration, perhaps, cherished and brought to life that bright phalanx of wits, Wycherley, and Congreve, and the rest; but it threw our graver dramatists into the shade. Comedy flourished, but Tragedy died; or, rather, it grew diseased, and bloated, and unnatural, and lost its strength and healthier look. It grew unwieldy, imitative, foreign. The French had studied and copied the Greek drama; and the English studied and copied the French. All fashions came at that time from Paris, and literature was not an exception. Corneille first, and afterwards Racine, who was contemporary with Dryden, lent their help to put our native dramatists out of the play. In fact, our playwrights found it much easier to imitate the French authors successfully, than to rival their predecessors in England. To this, as well as to the force of fashion, which undoubtedly operated very strongly, may be ascribed the change in our dramatic literature. The declamatory plays of Dryden and the others do not contain a tithe of the original thought that was lavished upon many of the second-rate dramas of the Elizabethan age. The tone of tragedy itself became cold and bombastic, where it was once full of life and simplicity, and the sentiments degenerated with the style. They were heavy and commonplace, or else were pilfered from the elder writers without acknowledgment, and dressed up in gaudy and fantastic habits, to suit the poor purposes of a play-mechanic. It is now well known that Rowe stole the entire plot and characters of his "Fair Penitent" from Massinger; but it

is not so generally known that his production is contemptible in comparison with the original play.

Dryden was a striking and nervous writer. As a satirist, he has scarcely been equalled. As a dramatist, he had great command of language, and was full of high-sounding phrases; but these he showered indiscriminately upon all his characters, whatever their worth or occupation might be. The courtier, the tyrant, the victim, the slave, the cynic, were equally well provided with gorgeous words, and lavished them away alike upon all occasions. Dryden seems to have had a quick insight into one quarter of men's minds, and drew out their foibles and darker traits with the hand of a master; but he could not portray a whole character, the good and the ill, and those proper shades of the intellect, those turns and touches of passion, which have made Shakspeare immortal. On the contrary, he had an obliquity of understanding which led him to the discovery of error only. His intellectual *retina* seems to have been too small to receive the whole compass and sketch of man. If he praised, he praised in general, with little discrimination; and his writings have none of the nicer touches of affection or goodness. But, with the lash in his hand, and a knave or a fool to deal with, he was an exemplary person. No culprit could stand against him.

Of all the dramatic writers since the return of Charles, *Lee* may be considered as the first. It is true, that Otway has constructed the *best* drama, and the stage is most indebted to him; but Lee had assuredly more imagination and passion than his rival, although every play which he has written is disgraced by the most unaccountable fustian. There is great tenderness and beauty in 'Theodosius;' and great power, mixed with extravagance, both in "The Rival Queens" and the "Massacre of Paris," and others. This last-mentioned play, which is not, we apprehend, very generally known, shows a skill in character equal to Otway, to whom Lee is commonly decidedly inferior in that respect. As a specimen of the spirit of Lee's dialogue, the reader may take the following from the "Massacre of Paris." The Duke of Guise and the Cardinal of Lorrain are speaking of Marguerite (de Valois), who has just left them in a transport of passion.

> "*Car.* What have you done, my lord, to make her thus?
> *Guise.* Causes are endless for a woman's loving.
> Perhaps she has seen me break a lance on horseback;
> Or, as my custom is, all over arm'd
> Plunge in the Seine or Loire; and, where 'tis swiftest,
> Plow to my point against the headlong stream.
> 'Tis certain, were my soul of that soft make
> Which some believe, she has charms, my heavenly uncle," &c.

which he proceeds to discuss in a way to call down the rebuke of the Cardinal upon his amour,

> "Not for the sin; that 's as the conscience makes it,"

as his Eminence says, but for the "love." To this Guise replies:—

> "*Guise.* I love, 'tis true, but most for my ambition:
> Therefore I thought to marry Marguerite.
> But, oh! that Cassiopeia in the Chair,
> The regent-mother, and that dog *Anjou*,
> Cross constellations! blast my plots ere born.
> The king, too, frowns upon me; for, last night,
> Hearing a ball was promised by the queen,
> I came to help the show; when, at the door,

The king, who stood himself the sentry, stopp'd me,
And asked me what I came for? I replied,
To serve his majesty: he, sharp and short,
Retorted thus — he did not need my service.
Car. 'Tis plain, you must resolve to quit her;
For I am charged to tell you, she's design'd
To be the wife of Henry of Navarre.
'Tis the main beam in all that mighty engine
Which now begins to move ——
Guise. I have it, and methinks it looks like *D'Alva.*
I see the very motion of his beard,
His opening nostrils, and his dropping lids;
I hear him croak, too, to the king and queen:
'In Biscay's bay, — at Bayonne
Fish for the great fish; — take no care for frogs; —
Cut off the poppy heads; — lay the winds fast,
And straight the waves (the people) will be still.'"

Otway, however, on the whole, seems to have shown in his great tragedy ("Venice Preserved") more *dramatic* power than Lee; for although there is a good deal of common-place in it, and more than enough of prose, that tragedy is certainly entitled to rank very high as a dramatic production. Otway's pretensions to mere poetry were very slight; and his lyrical pieces are entirely worthless. What he effected, he did by a strong contrast of character, by spirited dialogue, and by always keeping in view the main object of the play. He did not dally with his subject, nor waste his strength in figures and conceits, but went straight to the end, and kept expectation alive. It must be confessed, however, that Jaffier and Belvidera are sometimes sufficiently tedious: but Pierre is a bold and striking figure, who stands out, like a rock, from the sea of sorrow which is poured around him. He is in fact the hero of the play, and, like a pleasant discord in music, saves it from the monotony which would otherwise oppress it.

Southern is less tumid than Lee and Dryden, and altogether more free from blemish; but he is a weaker writer than either. His "Isabella" possesses great pathos, and his dialogue is for the most part natural; but he has little else to boast of. *Congreve* was a wit of the first water, and the most sparkling comic writer perhaps in the circle of letters; and yet he wrote the "Mourning Bride." We think that, with his wit, he could not have been insensible to its defects. Of *Rowe*, *Hughes*, *Hill*, *Howard*, *Murphy*, *Thomson*, *Cumberland*, &c. what can we say, but that they all wrote tragedies, which succeeded — we believe? *Addison*'s "Cato" is as cold as a statue, and correct enough to satisfy the most fastidious of critics. We ourselves prefer his Sir Roger de Coverley: but these things are matters of taste. With regard to *Dr. Johnson*'s "Irene," we must say that it would reflect little or no credit upon any writer whatever; and that it detracts from, rather than adds to, *his* deservedly great reputation, is, we apprehend, universally allowed. The author, we believe, once adventured an opinion, that nothing which had deserved to live was forgotten. We wonder whether, if he were alive, he would (in the present state of his play) retain his old way of thinking. These general maxims are dreadfully perilous to poets' reputations, and should not be proclaimed but with due deliberation.

Moore and *Lillo* were writers of *domestic* tragedy, and, with the exception perhaps of Heyward and Rowley, and we may add Southern, bear little resemblance to any of their predecessors. Theirs was a muse

born without wings, but nursed amidst sin and misfortune, and fed with tears. They neither attempted to soar, nor to penetrate below the surface; but contented themselves with common calamities, every-day sorrows. Their plays are, like the Newgate Calendar, or a coroner's inquisition, true, but unpleasant. They give us an account of Mr. Beverley, who poisoned himself but the other day, after his losses at hazard or rouge et noir; or they admit us into the condemned cell of a city apprentice who has robbed his master. Their characters have all a London look; they frequent the city clubs, and breathe the air of traffic. These writers are as good as a newspaper—and no better. But Tragedy was surely meant for other and higher things than to bring the gallows (even with its moral) upon the stage, or to reduce to dialogue the coroner's inquisition or police reports. As in a picture, it is not always the truest imitator of nature who is the best painter; for an artist may make an unexceptionable map of the human face, and set down the features and furrows truly, and yet be unable to produce a grand work: — so is the minute detail of facts, however melancholy, insufficient in itself for the purposes of good tragedy. The Muse's object is not to shock and terrify, or to show what may be better seen at the scaffold or in the hospital; but it is to please as well as move us, to elevate as well as to instruct.

MILTON, (No. I.)

DISQUISITION ON HIS POETRY.*

It is by his poetry that Milton is best known; and it is of his poetry that we wish to speak. By the general suffrage of the civilised world, his place has been assigned among the greatest masters of the art. His detractors, however, though outvoted, have not been silenced. There are many critics, and some of great name, who contrive in the same breath to extol the poems and to decry the poet. The works, they acknowledge, considered in themselves, may be classed among the noblest productions of the human mind; but they will not allow the author to rank with those great men who, born in the infancy of civilisation, supplied, by their own powers, the want of instruction; and, though destitute of models themselves, bequeathed to posterity models which defy imitation. Milton, it is said, inherited what his predecessors created; he lived in an enlightened age; he received a finished education; and we must therefore, if we would form a just estimate of his powers, make large deductions for these advantages.

We venture to say, on the contrary, paradoxical as the remark may appear, that no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavourable circumstances than Milton. He doubted, as he has himself owned, whether he had not been born "an age too late." For this notion Johnson has thought fit to make him the butt of his clumsy ridicule. The poet, we believe, understood the nature of his art better than the critic. He knew

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* Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine, compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone.—Vol. xlii. p. 305. August, 1825.

that his poetical genius derived no advantage from the civilisation which surrounded him, or from the learning which he had acquired; and he looked back with something like regret to the ruder age of simple words and vivid impressions.

We think that, as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. Therefore, though we admire those great works of imagination which have appeared in dark ages, we do not admire them the more because they have appeared in dark ages. On the contrary, we hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in a civilised age. We cannot understand why those who believe in that most orthodox article of literary faith, that the earliest poets are generally the best, should wonder at the rule as if it were the exception. Surely the uniformity of the phenomenon indicates a corresponding uniformity in the cause.

The fact is, that common observers reason from the progress of the experimental sciences to that of the imitative arts. The improvement of the former is gradual and slow. Ages are spent in collecting materials, ages more in separating and combining them. Even when a system has been formed, there is still something to add, to alter, or to reject. Every generation enjoys the use of a vast hoard bequeathed to it by antiquity; and transmits it, augmented by fresh acquisitions, to future ages. In these pursuits, therefore, the first speculators lie under great disadvantages, and even when they fail, are entitled to praise. Their pupils, with far inferior intellectual powers, speedily surpass them in actual attainments. Every girl who has read Mrs. Marcet's little Dialogues on Political Economy could teach Montague or Walpole many lessons in finance. Any intelligent man may now, by resolutely applying himself for a few years to mathematics, learn more than the great Newton knew after half a century of study and meditation.

But it is not thus with music, with painting, or with sculpture. Still less is it thus with poetry. The progress of refinement rarely supplies these arts with better objects of imitation. It may indeed improve the instruments which are necessary to the mechanical operations of the musician, the sculptor, and the painter. But language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive and then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical, that of a half civilised people is poetical.

This change in the language of men is partly the cause and partly the effect of a corresponding change in the nature of their intellectual operations,— a change by which science gains and poetry loses. Generalisation is necessary to the advancement of knowledge, but particularly in the creations of the imagination. In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals, and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse poems. They give us vague phrases instead of images, and personified qualities instead of men. They may be better able to analyse human nature than their predecessors. But analysis is not the business of the poet. His office is to portray, not to dissect. He may believe in a moral sense, like Shaftesbury; he may refer all human actions to self-interest, like Helvetius; or he may never think about the matter at all. His creed on such subjects will no more influence his poetry, properly so called, than the notions which a painter may have conceived respecting the lacrymal glands, or the circulation of the blood, will affect the tears of his Niobe, or the blushes of his Aurora. If Shakspeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain

that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the "Fable of the Bees." But could Mandeville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man,—a real, living, individual man?

Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if any thing which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness. By poetry we mean, not of course all writing in verse, nor even all good writing in verse. Our definition excludes many metrical compositions which, on other grounds, deserve the highest praise. By poetry we mean, the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination,—the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colours. Thus the greatest of poets has described it, in lines universally admired for the vigour and felicity of their diction, and still more valuable on account of the just notion which they convey of the art in which he excelled:—

> "As imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation, and a name."

These are the fruits of the "fine frenzy" which he ascribes to the poet,—a fine frenzy, doubtless, but still a frenzy. Truth, indeed, is essential to poetry; but it is the truth of madness. The reasonings are just, but the premises are false. After the first suppositions have been made, every thing ought to be consistent; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence of all people children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality. No man, whatever his sensibility may be, is ever affected by Hamlet or Lear, as a little girl is affected by the story of poor Red Riding-hood. She knows that it is all false, that wolves cannot speak, that there are no wolves in England. Yet in spite of her knowledge she believes; she weeps, she trembles; she dares not go into a dark room, lest she should feel the teeth of the monster at her throat. Such is the despotism of the imagination over uncultivated minds.

In a rude state of society, men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is therefore in such a state of society that we may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age, there will be much intelligence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses, and even of good ones,—but little poetry. Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. They will talk about the old poets, and comment on them, and to a certain degree enjoy them. But they will scarcely be able to conceive the effect which poetry produced on their ruder ancestors,—the agony, the ecstasy, the plenitude of belief. The Greek Rhapsodists, according to Plato, could not recite Homer without almost falling into convulsions.* The Mohawk hardly feels the scalping-knife while he shouts his death-song. The power which the ancient bards of Wales and Germany exercised over their auditors seems to modern readers almost miraculous. Such feelings are very rare

* See the Dialogue between Socrates and Io.

in a civilised community, and most rare among those who participate most in its improvements. They linger longest among the peasantry.

Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry effects its purpose most completely in a dark age. As the light of knowledge breaks in upon its exhibitions, — as the outlines of certainty become more and more definite, and the shades of probability more and more distinct, — the hues and lineaments of the phantoms which it calls up grow fainter and fainter. We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.

He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child. He must take to pieces the whole web of his mind. He must unlearn much of that knowledge which has perhaps constituted hitherto his chief title to superiority. His very talents will be a hinderance to him. His difficulties will be proportioned to his proficiency in the pursuits which are fashionable among his contemporaries; and that proficiency will in general be proportioned to the vigour and activity of his mind. And it is well if, after all his sacrifices and exertions, his works do not resemble a lisping man, or a modern ruin. We have seen in our own time great talents, intense labour, and long meditation, employed in this struggle against the spirit of the age; and employed, we will not say absolutely in vain, but with dubious success and feeble applause.

If these reasonings be just, no poet has ever triumphed over greater difficulties than Milton. He received a learned education. He was a profound and elegant classical scholar: he had studied all the mysteries of Rabbinical literature: he was intimately acquainted with every language of modern Europe from which either pleasure or information was then to be derived. He was perhaps the only great poet of later times who has been distinguished by the excellence of his Latin verse. The genius of Petrarch was scarcely of the first order; and his poems in the ancient language, though much praised by those who have never read them, are wretched compositions. Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination: nor indeed do we think his classical diction comparable to that of Milton. The authority of Johnson is against us on this point. But Johnson had studied the bad writers of the middle ages till he had become utterly insensible to the Augustan elegance, and was as ill qualified to judge between two Latin styles as a habitual drunkard to set up for a wine-taster.

Versification in a dead language is an exotic, a far-fetched, costly, sickly imitation of that which elsewhere may be found in healthful and spontaneous perfection. The soils on which this rarity flourishes are in general as ill suited to the production of vigorous native poetry as the flower-pots of a hot-house to the growth of oaks. That the author of the Paradise Lost should have written the Epistle to Manso was truly wonderful. Never before were such marked originality and such exquisite mimicry found together. Indeed, in all the Latin poems of Milton the artificial manner indispensable to such works is admirably preserved; while, at the same time, the richness of his fancy and the elevation of his sentiments give to them a peculiar charm, an air of nobleness and freedom, which distinguishes them from all other writings of the same class. They remind us of the amusements of those angelic warriors who composed the cohort of Gabriel: —

> " About him exercise heroic games
> The unarmed youth of heaven. But o'er their heads
> Celestial armoury, shield, helm, and spear,
> Hung bright, with diamond flaming and with gold."

We cannot look upon the sportive exercises for which the genius of Milton ungirds itself, without catching a glimpse of the gorgeous and terrible panoply which it is accustomed to wear. The strength of his imagination triumphed over every obstacle. So intense and ardent was the fire of his mind, that it not only was not suffocated beneath the weight of its fuel, but penetrated the whole superincumbent mass with its own heat and radiance.

It is not our intention to attempt any thing like a complete examination of the poetry of Milton. The public has long been agreed as to the merit of the most remarkable passages, the incomparable harmony of the numbers, and the excellence of that style which no rival has been able to equal, and no parodist to degrade; which displays in their highest perfection the idiomatic powers of the English tongue, and to which every ancient and every modern language has contributed something of grace, of energy, or of music. In the vast field of criticism on which we are entering, innumerable reapers have already put their sickles. Yet the harvest is so abundant that the negligent search of a straggling gleaner may be rewarded with a sheaf.

The most striking characteristic of the poetry of Milton is the extreme remoteness of the associations by means of which it acts on the reader. Its effect is produced, not so much by what it expresses, as by what it suggests; not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them. He electrifies the mind through conductors. The most unimaginative man must understand the Iliad. Homer gives him no choice, and requires from him no exertion; but takes the whole upon himself, and sets his images in so clear a light that it is impossible to be blind to them. The works of Milton cannot be comprehended or enjoyed, unless the mind of the reader co-operate with that of the writer. He does not paint a finished picture, or play for a mere passive listener. He sketches, and leaves others to fill up the outline. He strikes the key-note, and expects his hearer to make out the melody.

We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing; but, applied to the writings of Milton, it is most appropriate. His poetry acts like an incantation. Its merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power. There would seem, at first sight, to be no more in his words than in other words. But they are words of enchantment. No sooner are they pronounced, than the past is present, and the distant near. New forms of beauty start at once into existence, and all the burial-places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentence: substitute one synonyme for another, and the whole effect is destroyed. The spell loses its power; and he who should then hope to conjure with it, would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood crying " Open Wheat," " Open Barley," to the door which obeyed no sound but " Open Sesame!" The miserable failure of Dryden in his attempt to rewrite some parts of the Paradise Lost is a remarkable instance of this.

In support of these observations, we may remark, that scarcely any passages in the poems of Milton are more generally known, or more frequently repeated, than those which are little more than muster-rolls of names. They are not always more appropriate or more melodious than

other names; but they are charmed names. Every one of them is the first link in a long chain of associated ideas. Like the dwelling-place of our infancy revisited in manhood, like the song of our country heard in a strange land, they produce upon us an effect wholly independent of their intrinsic value. One transports us back to a remote period of history. Another places us among the moral scenery and manners of a distant country. A third evokes all the dear classical recollections of childhood, the school-room, the dog-eared Virgil, the holiday, and the prize. A fourth brings before us the splendid phantoms of chivalrous romance, the trophied lists, the embroidered housings, the quaint devices, the haunted forests, the enchanted gardens, the achievements of enamoured knights, and the smiles of rescued princesses.

In none of the works of Milton is his peculiar manner more happily displayed than in the Allegro and the Penseroso. It is impossible to conceive that the mechanism of language can be brought to a more exquisite degree of perfection. These poems differ from others as ottar of roses differs from ordinary rose-water, the close packed essence from the thin diluted mixture. They are indeed not so much poems, as collections of hints from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself. Every epithet is a text for a Canto.

The Comus and the Samson Agonistes are works which, though of very different merit, offer some marked points of resemblance. They are both lyric poems in the form of plays. There are perhaps no two kinds of composition so essentially dissimilar as the drama and the ode. The business of the dramatist is to keep himself out of sight, and to let nothing appear but his characters. As soon as he attracts notice to his personal feelings, the illusion is broken. The effect is as unpleasant as that which is produced on the stage by the voice of a prompter, or the entrance of a scene-shifter. Hence it was that the tragedies of Byron were his least successful performances. They resemble those pasteboard pictures invented by the friend of children, Mr. Newberry, in which a single moveable head goes round twenty different bodies; so that the same face looks out upon us successively, from the uniform of a hussar, the furs of a judge, and the rags of a beggar. In all the characters, patriots and tyrants, haters and lovers, the frown and sneer of Harold were discernible in an instant. But this species of egotism, though fatal to the drama, is the inspiration of the ode. It is the part of the lyric poet to abandon himself, without reserve, to his own emotions.

Between these hostile elements many great men have endeavoured to effect an amalgamation; but never with complete success. The Greek Drama, on the model of which the Samson was written, sprung from the ode. The dialogue was engrafted on the chorus, and naturally partook of its character. The genius of the greatest of the Athenian dramatists co-operated with the circumstances under which tragedy made its first appearance. Æschylus was, head and heart, a lyric poet. In his time, the Greeks had far more intercourse with the East than in the days of Homer; and they had not yet acquired that immense superiority in war, in science, and in the arts, which, in the following generation, led them to treat the Asiatics with contempt. From the narrative of Herodotus it should seem, that they still looked up, with the veneration of disciples, to Egypt and Assyria. At this period, accordingly, it was natural that the literature of Greece should be tinctured with the Oriental style. And that style, we think, is clearly discernible in the works of Pindar and Æschylus. The latter often reminds us of the Hebrew writers. The book of Job, in-

deed, in conduct and diction, bears a considerable resemblance to some of his dramas. Considered as plays, his works are absurd: considered as choruses, they are above all praise. If, for instance, we examine the address of Clytemnestra to Agamemnon on his return, or the description of the seven Argive chiefs, by the principles of dramatic writing, we shall instantly condemn them as monstrous. But, if we forget the characters, and think only of the poetry, we shall admit that it has never been surpassed in energy and magnificence. Sophocles made the Greek drama as dramatic as was consistent with its original form. His portraits of men have a sort of similarity; but it is the similarity not of a painting, but of a bas-relief. It suggests a resemblance; but it does not produce an illusion. Euripides attempted to carry the reform farther. But it was a task far beyond his powers, perhaps beyond any powers. Instead of correcting what was bad, he destroyed what was excellent. He substituted crutches for stilts, bad sermons for good odes.

Milton, it is well known, admired Euripides highly; much more highly than, in our opinion, he deserved. Indeed, the caresses which this partiality leads him to bestow on "sad Electra's poet," sometimes remind us of the beautiful Queen of Fairyland kissing the long ears of Bottom. At all events, there can be no doubt that this veneration for the Athenian, whether just or not, was injurious to the Samson Agonistes. Had he taken Æschylus for his model, he would have given himself up to the lyric inspiration, and poured out profusely all the treasures of his mind, without bestowing a thought on those dramatic proprieties which the nature of the work rendered it impossible to preserve. In the attempt to reconcile things in their own nature inconsistent, he has failed, as every one else must have failed. We cannot identify ourselves with the characters, as in a good play. We cannot identify ourselves with the poet, as in a good ode. The conflicting ingredients, like an acid and an alkali mixed, neutralise each other. We are by no means insensible to the merits of this celebrated piece, to the severe dignity of the style, the graceful and pathetic solemnity of the opening speech, or the wild and barbaric melody which gives so striking an effect to the choral passages. But we think it, we confess, the least successful effort of the genius of Milton.

The Comus is framed on the model of the Italian Masque, as the Samson is framed on the model of the Greek Tragedy. It is certainly the noblest performance of the kind which exists in any language. It is as far superior to the Faithful Shepherdess, as the Faithful Shepherdess is to the Aminta, or the Aminta to the Pastor Fido. It was well for Milton that he had here no Euripides to mislead him. He understood and loved the literature of modern Italy. But he did not feel for it the same veneration which he entertained for the remains of Athenian and Roman poetry, consecrated by so many lofty and endearing recollections. The faults, moreover, of his Italian predecessors, were of a kind to which his mind had a deadly antipathy. He could stoop to a plain style, sometimes even to a bald style: but false brilliancy was his utter aversion. His muse had no objection to a russet attire: but she turned with disgust from the finery of Guarini, as tawdry and as paltry as the rags of a chimney-sweeper on May-day. Whatever ornaments *she* wears are of massive gold, not only dazzling to the sight, but capable of standing the severest test of the crucible.

Milton attended in the Comus to the distinction which he neglected in the Samson. He made it, what it ought to be, essentially lyrical, and dramatic only in semblance. He has not attempted a fruitless struggle against a defect inherent in the nature of that species of composition; and

he has therefore succeeded, wherever success was not impossible. The speeches must be read as majestic soliloquies; and he who so reads them will be enraptured with their eloquence, their sublimity, and their music. The interruptions of the dialogue, however, impose a constraint upon the writer, and break the illusion of the reader. The finest passages are those which are lyric in form as well as in spirit. "I should much commend," says the excellent Sir Henry Wotton, in a letter to Milton, "the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto, I must plainly confess to you, I have seen yet nothing parallel in our language." The criticism was just. It is when Milton escapes from the shackles of the dialogue, when he is discharged from the labour of uniting two incongruous styles, when he is at liberty to indulge his choral raptures without reserve, that he rises even above himself. Then, like his own Good Genius bursting from the earthly form and weeds of Thyrsis, he stands forth in celestial freedom and beauty; he seems to cry exultingly —

> "Now my task is smoothly done,
> I can fly, or I can run,"

to skim the earth, to soar above the clouds, to bathe in the Elysian dew of the rainbow, and to inhale the balmy smells of nard and cassia, which the musky wings of the zephyr scatter through the cedared alleys of the Hesperides.*

There are several of the minor poems of Milton on which we would willingly make a few remarks. Still more willingly would we enter into a detailed examination of that admirable poem, the Paradise Regained, which, strangely enough, is scarcely ever mentioned except as an instance of the blindness of that parental affection which men of letters bear towards the offspring of their intellects. That Milton was mistaken in preferring this work, excellent as it is, to the Paradise Lost, we must readily admit. But we are sure that the superiority of the Paradise Lost to the Paradise Regained, is not more decided than the superiority of the Paradise Regained to every poem which has since made its appearance. But our limits prevent us from discussing the point at length. We hasten on to that extraordinary production which the general suffrage of critics has placed in the highest class of human compositions.

The only poem of modern times which can be compared with the Paradise Lost is the Divine Comedy. The subject of Milton in some points resembled that of Dante; but he has treated it in a widely different manner. We cannot, we think, better illustrate our opinion respecting our own great poet, than by contrasting him with the father of Tuscan literature.

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* "There eternal summer dwells,
And west winds, with musky wing,
About the cedar'd alleys fling
Nard and cassia's balmy smells:
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purfled scarf can shew,
And drenches with Elysian dew,
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinths and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound."

The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante as the hieroglyphics of Egypt differed from the picture writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves: — they stand simply for what they are. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible only to the initiated. Their value depends less on what they directly represent, than on what they remotely suggest. However strange, however grotesque, may be the appearance which Dante undertakes to describe, he never shrinks from describing it. He gives us the shape, the colour, the sound, the smell, the taste; he counts the numbers; he measures the size. His similes are the illustrations of a traveller. Unlike those of other poets, and especially of Milton, they are introduced in a plain business-like manner, not for the sake of any beauty in the objects from which they are drawn, not for the sake of any ornament which they may impart to the poem, but simply in order to make the meaning of the writer as clear to the reader as it is to himself. The ruins of the precipice which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of hell were like those of the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The cataract of Phlegethon was like that of Aqua Cheta at the monastery of St. Benedict. The place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the vast cemetery of Arles!

Now, let us compare with the exact details of Dante the dim intimations of Milton. We will cite a few examples. The English poet has never thought of taking the measure of Satan. He gives us merely a vague idea of vast bulk. In one passage the fiend lies stretched out huge in length, floating many a rood, equal in size to the earth-born enemies of Jove, or to the sea-monster which the mariner mistakes for an island. When he addresses himself to battle against the guardian angels, he stands like Teneriffe or Atlas; his stature reaches the sky. Contrast with these descriptions the lines in which Dante has described the gigantic spectre of Nimrod. "His face seemed to me as long and as broad as the ball of St. Peter's at Rome; and his other limbs were in proportion; so that the bank, which concealed him from the waist downwards, nevertheless showed so much of him, that three tall Germans would in vain have attempted to reach to his hair." We are sensible that we do no justice to the admirable style of the Florentine poet. But Mr. Cary's translation is not at hand; and our version, however rude, is sufficient to illustrate our meaning.

Once more, compare the lazar-house in the eleventh book of the Paradise Lost with the last ward of Malebolge in Dante. Milton avoids the loathsome details, and takes refuge in indistinct but solemn and tremendous imagery, — Despair hurrying from couch to couch, to mock the wretches with his attendance; Death shaking his dart over them, but, in spite of supplications, delaying to strike. What says Dante? "There was such a moan there, as there would be if all the sick who, between July and September, are in the hospitals of Valdichiana, and of the Tuscan swamps, and of Sardinia, were in one pit together; and such a stench was issuing forth as is wont to issue from decayed limbs."

We will not take upon ourselves the invidious office of settling precedency between two such writers. Each in his own department is incomparable; and each, we may remark, has, wisely or fortunately, taken a subject adapted to exhibit his peculiar talent to the greatest advantage. The Divine Comedy is a personal narrative. Dante is the eye witness and ear-witness of that which he relates. He is the very man who has heard the tormented spirits crying out for the second death, who has read the

dusky characters on the portal within which there is no hope, who has hidden his face from the terrors of the Gorgon, who has fled from the hooks and the seething pitch of Barbariccia and Diaghignazzo. His own hands have grasped the shaggy sides of Lucifer. His own feet have climbed the mountain of expiation. His own brow has been marked by the purifying angel. The reader would throw aside such a tale in incredulous disgust, unless it were told with the strongest air of veracity, with a sobriety even in its horrors, with the greatest precision and multiplicity in its details. The narrative of Milton in this respect differs from that of Dante, as the adventures of Amadis differ from those of Gulliver. The author of Amadis would have made his book ridiculous if he had introduced those minute particulars which give such a charm to the work of Swift—the nautical observations, the affected delicacy about names, the official documents transcribed at full length, and all the unmeaning gossip and scandal of the court, springing out of nothing, and tending to nothing. We are not shocked at being told that a man who lived, nobody knows when, saw many very strange sights, and we can easily abandon ourselves to the illusion of the romance. But when Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, now actually resident at Rotherhithe, tells us of pygmies and giants, flying islands and philosophising horses, nothing but such circumstantial touches could produce for a single moment a deception on the imagination.

Of all the poets who have introduced into their works the agency of supernatural beings, Milton has succeeded best. Here Dante decidedly yields to him: and as this is a point on which many rash and ill-considered judgments have been pronounced, we feel inclined to dwell on it a little longer. The most fatal error which a poet can possibly commit in the management of his machinery, is that of attempting to philosophise too much. Milton has been often censured for ascribing to spirits many functions of which spirits must be incapable. But these objections, though sanctioned by eminent names, originate, we venture to say, in profound ignorance of the art of poetry.

What is spirit? What are our own minds, the portion of spirit with which we are best acquainted? We observe certain phenomena. We cannot explain them into material causes. We therefore infer that there exists something which is not material. But of this something we have no idea. We can define it only by negatives. We can reason about it only by symbols. We use the word; but we have no image of the thing: and the business of poetry is with images, and not with words. The poet uses words, indeed; but they are merely the instruments of his art, not its objects. They are the materials which he is to dispose in such a manner as to present a picture to the mental eye. And, if they are not so disposed, they are no more entitled to be called poetry than a bale of canvas and a box of colours to be called a painting.

Logicians may reason about abstractions. But the great mass of mankind can never feel an interest in them. They must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude in all ages and nations to idolatry can be explained on no other principle. The first inhabitants of Greece, there is every reason to believe, worshipped one invisible Deity. But the necessity of having something more definite to adore, produced, in a few centuries, the innumerable crowd of gods and goddesses. In like manner the ancient Persians thought it impious to exhibit the Creator under a human form. Yet even these transferred to the sun the worship which, speculatively, they considered due only to the Supreme Mind. The history of the Jews is the record of a continued struggle between pure Theism, sup-

ported by the most terrible sanctions, and the strangely fascinating desire of having some visible and tangible object of adoration. Perhaps none of the secondary causes which Gibbon has assigned for the rapidity with which Christianity spread over the world, while Judaism scarcely ever acquired a proselyte, operated more powerfully than this feeling. God the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshippers. A philosopher might admire so noble a conception: but the crowd turned away in disgust from words which presented no image to their minds. It was before Deity embodied in a human form, walking among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross, that the prejudices of the Synagogue, and the doubts of the Academy, and the pride of the Portico, and the fasces of the Lictor, and the swords of thirty legions, were humbled in the dust! Soon after Christianity had achieved its triumph, the principle which had assisted it began to corrupt it. It became a new Paganism. Patron saints assumed the offices of household gods. St. George took the place of Mars; St. Elmo consoled the mariner for the loss of Castor and Pollux; the Virgin Mother and Cecilia succeeded to Venus and the Muses. The fascination of sex and loveliness was again joined to that of celestial dignity; and the homage of chivalry was blended with that of religion. Reformers have often made a stand against these feelings; but never with more than apparent and partial success. The men who demolished the images in cathedrals have not always been able to demolish those which were enshrined in their minds. It would not be difficult to show, that in politics the same rule holds good. Doctrines, we are afraid, must generally be *embodied* before they can excite a strong public feeling. The multitude is more easily interested for the most unmeaning badge, or the most insignificant name, than for the most important principle.

From these considerations we infer, that no poet, who should affect that metaphysical accuracy for the want of which Milton has been blamed, would escape a disgraceful failure. Still, however, there was another extreme, which, though far less dangerous, was also to be avoided. The imaginations of men are in a great measure under the control of their opinions. The most exquisite art of poetical colouring can produce no illusion, when it is employed to represent that which is at once perceived to be incongruous and absurd. Milton wrote in an age of philosophers and theologians. It was necessary therefore for him to abstain from giving such a shock to their understandings as might break the charm which it was his object to throw over their imaginations. This is the real explanation of the indistinctness and inconsistency with which he has often been reproached. Dr. Johnson acknowledges that it was absolutely necessary for him to clothe his spirits with material forms. "But," says he, "he should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and seducing the reader to drop it from his thoughts." This is easily said; but what if he could not seduce the reader to drop it from *his* thoughts? What if the contrary opinion had taken so full a possession of the minds of men as to leave no room even for the *quasi-belief* which poetry requires? Such we suspect to have been the case. It was impossible for the poet to adopt altogether the material or the immaterial system. He therefore took his stand on the debateable ground. He left the whole in ambiguity. He has doubtless, by so doing, laid himself open to the charge of inconsistency. But, though philosophically in the wrong, we cannot but believe that he was poetically in

the right. This task, which almost any other writer would have found impracticable, was easy to him. The peculiar art which he possessed of communicating his meaning circuitously, through a long succession of associated ideas, and of intimating more than he expressed, enabled him to disguise those incongruities which he could not avoid.

Poetry which relates to the beings of another world, ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so. That of Dante is picturesque, indeed, beyond any that was ever written. Its effect approaches to that produced by the pencil or the chisel. But it is picturesque to the exclusion of all mystery. This is a fault indeed on the right side,—a fault inseparable from the plan of his poem, which, as we have already observed, rendered the utmost accuracy of description necessary. Still it is a fault. His supernatural agents excite an interest; but it is not the interest which is proper to supernatural agents. We feel that we could talk with his ghosts and demons, without any emotion of unearthly awe. We could, like Don Juan, ask them to supper, and eat heartily in their company. His angels are good men with wings. His devils are spiteful ugly executioners. His dead men are merely living men in strange situations. The scene which passes between the poet and Facinata is justly celebrated. Still Facinata in the burning tomb is exactly what Facinata would have been at an *auto da fe*. Nothing can be more touching than the first interview of Dante and Beatrice. Yet what is it but a lovely woman chiding, with sweet austere composure, the lover for whose affection she is grateful, but whose vices she reprobates? The feelings which give the passage its charm would suit the streets of Florence as well as the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

The Spirits of Milton are unlike those of almost all other writers. His Fiends, in particular, are wonderful creations. They are not metaphysical abstractions. They are not wicked men. They are not ugly beasts. They have no horns, no tails, none of the fee-faw-fum of Tasso and Klopstock. They have just enough in common with human nature to be intelligible to human beings. Their characters are, like their forms, marked by a certain dim resemblance to those of men, but exaggerated to gigantic dimensions, and veiled in mysterious gloom.

Perhaps the gods and demons of Æschylus may best bear a comparison with the angels and devils of Milton. The style of the Athenian had, as we have remarked, something of the vagueness and tenor of the Oriental character; and the same peculiarity may be traced in his mythology. It has nothing of the amenity and elegance which we generally find in the superstitions of Greece. All is rugged, barbaric, and colossal. His legends seem to harmonise less with the fragrant groves and graceful porticoes in which his countrymen paid their vows to the God of Light and Goddess of Desire, than with those huge and grotesque labyrinths of eternal granite, in which Egypt enshrined her mystic Osiris. or in which Hindostan still bows down to her seven-headed idols. His favourite gods are those of the elder generations—the sons of heaven and earth, compared with whom Jupiter himself was a stripling and an upstart, — the gigantic Titans and the inexorable Furies. Foremost among his creations of this class stands Prometheus, half fiend half redeemer, the friend of man, the sullen and implacable enemy of heaven. He bears undoubtedly a considerable resemblance to the Satan of Milton. In both we find the same impatience of control, the same ferocity, the same unconquerable pride. In both characters also are mingled, though in very different proportions, some kind and generous feelings. Prometheus, however, is

hardly superhuman enough. He talks too much of his chains and his uneasy posture: he is rather too much depressed and agitated. His resolution seems to depend on the knowledge which he possesses that he holds the fate of his torturer in his hands, and that the hour of his release will surely come. But Satan is a creature of another sphere. The might of his intellectual nature is victorious over the extremity of pain. Amidst agonies which cannot be conceived without horror, he deliberates, resolves, and even exults. Against the sword of Michael, against the thunder of Jehovah, against the flaming lake and the marl burning with solid fire, against the prospect of an eternity of unintermittent misery, his spirit bears up unbroken, resting on its own innate energies, requiring no support from any thing external, nor even from hope itself!

To return for a moment to the parallel which we have been attempting to draw between Milton and Dante, we would add, that the poetry of these great men has in a considerable degree taken its character from their moral qualities. They are not egotists. They rarely obtrude their idiosyncrasies on their readers. They have nothing in common with these modern beggers for fame, who extort a pittance from the compassion of the inexperienced, by exposing the nakedness and sores of their minds. Yet it would be difficult to name two writers whose works have been more completely, though undesignedly, coloured by their personal feelings.

The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of thought; that of Dante by intensity of feeling. In every line of the Divine Comedy we discern the asperity which is produced by pride struggling with misery. There is perhaps no work in the world so deeply and uniformly sorrowful. The melancholy of Dante was no fantastic caprice. It was not, as far as at this distance of time can be judged, the effect of external circumstances. It was from within. Neither love nor glory, neither the conflicts of earth nor the hope of heaven, could dispel it. It twined every consolation and every pleasure into its own nature. It resembled that noxious Sardinian soil, of which the intense bitterness is said to have been perceptible even in its honey. His mind was, in the noble language of the Hebrew poet, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and where the light was as darkness!" The gloom of his character discolours all the passions of men and all the face of nature, and tinges with its own livid hue the flowers of Paradise and the glories of the Eternal Throne! All the portraits of him are singularly characteristic. No person can look on the features, noble even to ruggedness, the dark furrows of the cheek, the haggard and woful stare of the eye, the sullen and contemptuous curve of the lip, and doubt that they belonged to a man too proud and too sensitive to be happy.

Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a lover—and, like Dante, he had been unfortunate in ambition and in love. He had survived his health and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men by whom he had been distinguished at his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come; some had carried into foreign climates their unconquerable hatred of oppression; some were pining in dungeons; and some had poured forth their blood on scaffolds. That hateful proscription, facetiously termed the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion, had set a mark on the poor, blind, deserted poet, and held him up by name to the hatred of a profligate court and an inconstant people! Venal and licentious scribblers, with just sufficient talent to clothe the thoughts of a pander in the style of a

bellman, were now the favourite writers of the sovereign and the public. It was a loathsome herd, which could be compared to nothing so fitly as to the rabble of Comus, — grotesque monsters, half bestial, half human, dropping with wine, bloated with gluttony, and reeling in obscene dances. Amidst these his Muse was placed, like the chaste Lady of the Masque, lofty, spotless, and serene — to be chattered at, and pointed at, and grinned at, by the whole rabble of Satyrs and Goblins. If ever despondency and asperity could be excused in any man, it might have been excused in Milton. But the strength of his mind overcame every calamity. Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor domestic afflictions, nor political disappointments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect, had power to disturb his sedate and majestic patience. His spirits do not seem to have been high, but they were singularly equable. His temper was serious, perhaps stern; but it was a temper which no sufferings could render sullen or fretful. Such as it was when, on the eve of great events, he returned from his travels, in the prime of health and manly beauty, loaded with literary distinctions, and glowing with patriotic hopes, such it continued to be — when, after having experienced every calamity which is incident to our nature, old, poor, sightless and disgraced, he retired to his hovel to die!

Hence it was, that, though he wrote the Paradise Lost at a time of life when images of beauty and tenderness are in general beginning to fade, even from those minds in which they have not been effaced by anxiety and disappointment, he adorned it with all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and in the moral world. Neither Theocritus nor Ariosto had a finer or a more healthful sense of the pleasantness of external objects, or loved better to luxuriate amidst sunbeams and flowers, the songs of nightingales, the juice of summer fruits, and the coolness of shady fountains. His conception of love unites all the voluptuousness of the Oriental haram, and all the gallantry of the chivalric tournament, with all the pure and quiet affection of an English fireside. His poetry reminds us of the miracles of Alpine scenery. Nooks and dells, beautiful as fairy land, are embosomed in its most rugged and gigantic elevations. The roses and myrtles bloom unchilled on the verge of the avalanche.

Traces, indeed, of the peculiar character of Milton may be found in all his works; but it is most strongly displayed in the Sonnets. Those remarkable poems have been undervalued by critics who have not understood their nature. They have no epigrammatic point. There is none of the ingenuity of Filicaja in the thought, none of the hard and brilliant enamel of Petrarch in the style. They are simple but majestic records of the feelings of the poet; as little tricked out for the public eye as his diary would have been. A victory, an expected attack upon the city, a momentary fit of depression or exultation, a jest thrown out against one of his books, a dream, which, for a short time restored to him that beautiful face over which the grave had closed for ever, led him to musings which, without effort, shaped themselves into verse. The unity of sentiment and severity of style which characterise these little pieces, remind us of the Greek Anthology, or perhaps still more of the Collects of the English Liturgy — the noble poem on the massacres of Piedmont is strictly a collect in verse.

The Sonnets are more or less striking, according as the occasions which gave birth to them are more or less interesting. But they are, almost without exception, dignified by a sobriety and greatness of mind to which we know not where to look for a parallel. It would indeed be

scarcely safe to draw any decided inferences as to the character of a writer, from passages directly egotistical. But the qualities which we have ascribed to Milton, though perhaps most strongly marked in those parts of his works which treat of his personal feelings, are distinguishable in every page, and impart to all his writings, prose and poetry, English, Latin, and Italian, a strong family likeness.

MILTON, (No. 2.)

HIS PUBLIC CONDUCT.*

MILTON's public conduct was such as was to be expected from a man of spirit so high and an intellect so powerful. He lived at one of the most memorable eras in the history of mankind; at the very crisis of the great conflict between Oromasdes and Arimanes — liberty and despotism — reason and prejudice. That great battle was fought for no single generation, for no single land. The destinies of the human race were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people. Then were first proclaimed those mighty principles which have since worked their way into the depths of the American forests; which have roused Greece from the slavery and degradation of two thousand years; and which, from one end of Europe to the other, have kindled an unquenchable fire in the hearts of the oppressed, and loosed the knees of the oppressors with a strange and unwonted fear!

Of those principles, then struggling for their infant existence, Milton was the most devoted and eloquent literary champion. We need not say how much we admire his public conduct. But we cannot disguise from ourselves that a large portion of his countrymen still think it unjustifiable. The civil war, indeed, has been more discussed, and is less understood, than any event in English history. The Roundheads laboured under the disadvantage of which the lion in the fable complained so bitterly. Though they were the conquerors, their enemies were the painters. As a body, they had done their utmost to decry and ruin literature; and literature was even with them, as, in the long run, it always is with its enemies. The best book on their side of the question is the charming memoir of Mrs. Hutchinson. May's History of the Parliament is good; but it breaks off at the most interesting crisis of the struggle. The performance of Ludlow is very foolish and violent; and most of the later writers who have espoused the same cause, Oldmixon for instance, and Catherine Macaulay, have, to say the least, been more distinguished by zeal than either by candour or by skill. On the other side are the most authoritative and the most popular historical works in our language, that of Clarendon, and that of Hume. The former is not only ably written, and full of valuable information, but has also an air of dignity and sincerity, which makes even the prejudices and errors with which it abounds respectable. Hume, from whose fascinating narrative the great mass of the read-

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* Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine, compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone. — Vol. xlii. p. 324. August, 1825.

ing public are still contented to take their opinions, hated religion so much, that he hated liberty for having been allied with religion—and has pleaded the cause of tyranny with the dexterity of an advocate, while affecting the impartiality of a judge.

The public conduct of Milton must be approved or condemned, according as the resistance of the people to Charles I. shall appear to be justifiable or criminal. We shall therefore make no apology for dedicating a few pages to the discussion of that interesting and most important question. We shall not argue it on general grounds; we shall not recur to those primary principles from which the claim of any government to the obedience of its subjects is to be deduced; it is a vantage-ground to which we are entitled; but we will relinquish it. We are, on this point, so confident of superiority, that we have no objection to imitate the ostentatious generosity of those ancient knights, who vowed to joust without helmet or shield against all enemies, and to give their antagonists the advantage of sun and wind. We will take the naked constitutional question. We confidently affirm, that every reason which can be urged in favour of the revolution of 1688, may be urged with at least equal force in favour of what is called the Great Rebellion.

In one respect only, we think, can the warmest admirers of Charles venture to say that he was a better sovereign than his son. He was not, in name and profession, a Papist; we say in name and profession,—because both Charles himself, and his miserable creature Laud, while they abjured the innocent badges of Popery, retained all its worst vices, a complete subjection of reason to authority, a weak preference of form to substance, a childish passion for mummeries, an idolatrous veneration for the priestly character, and, above all, a stupid and ferocious intolerance. This, however, we wave. We will concede that Charles was a good Protestant; but we say that his Protestantism does not make the slightest distinction between his case and that of James.

The principles of the Revolution have often been grossly misrepresented, and never more than in the course of the present year. There is a certain class of men, who, while they profess to hold in reverence the great names and great actions of former times, never look at them for any other purpose than in order to find in them some excuse for existing abuses. In every venerable precedent, they pass by what is essential, and take only what is accidental: they keep out of sight what is beneficial, and hold up to public imitation all that is defective. If, in any part of any great example, there be any thing unsound, these flesh-flies detect it with an unerring instinct, and dart upon it with a ravenous delight. They cannot always prevent the advocates of a good measure from compassing their end; but they feel, with their prototype, that

> "Their labours must be to pervert that end,
> And out of good still to find means of evil."

To the blessings which England has derived from the Revolution, these people are utterly insensible. The expulsion of a tyrant, the solemn recognition of popular rights, liberty, security, toleration, all go for nothing with them. One sect there was, which, from unfortunate temporary causes, it was thought necessary to keep under close restraint. One part of the empire there was, so unhappily circumstanced, that at that time its misery was necessary to our happiness, and its slavery to our freedom! These are the parts of the Revolution which the politicians of whom we speak love to contemplate, and which seem to them, not indeed to vindi-

cate, but in some degree to palliate, the good which it has produced. Talk to them of Naples, of Spain, or of South America! they stand forth, zealots for the doctrine of Divine Right — which has now come back to us, like a thief from transportation, under the *alias* of Legitimacy. But mention the miseries of Ireland! Then William is a hero. Then Somers and Shrewsbury are great men. Then the Revolution is a glorious era! The very same persons, who, in this country, never omit an opportunity of reviving every wretched Jacobite slander respecting the Whigs of that period, have no sooner crossed St. George's Channel, than they begin to fill their bumpers to the glorious and immortal memory. They may truly boast that they look not at men but at measures. So that evil be done, they care not who does it — the arbitrary Charles or the liberal William, Ferdinand the Catholic, or Frederick the Protestant! On such occasions their deadliest opponents may reckon upon their candid construction. The bold assertions of these people have of late impressed a large portion of the public with an opinion, that James II. was expelled simply because he was a Catholic, and that the Revolution was essentially a Protestant revolution.

But this certainly was *not* the case. Nor can any person who has acquired more knowledge of the history of those times than is to be found in Goldsmith's Abridgment, believe that, if James had held his own religious opinions without wishing to make proselytes, or if, wishing even to make proselytes, he had contented himself with exerting only his constitutional influence for that purpose, the Prince of Orange would ever have been invited over. Our ancestors, we suppose, knew their own meaning. And, if we may believe them, their hostility was *primarily* not to Popery, but to *Tyranny*. They did not drive out a tyrant because he was a Catholic; but they excluded Catholics from the crown, because they thought them likely to be tyrants. The ground on which they, in their famous resolution, declared the throne vacant, was this, "that James had broken the fundamental laws of the kingdom." Every man, therefore, who approves of the Revolution of 1688, must hold, that *the breach of fundamental laws on the part of the Sovereign* justifies resistance. The question then is this: Had Charles I. broken the fundamental laws of England?

No person can answer in the negative, unless he refuses credit, not merely to all the accusations brought against Charles by his opponents, but to the narratives of the warmest Royalists, and to the confessions of the King himself. If there be any truth in *any* historian of *any* party who has related the events of that reign, the conduct of Charles, from his accession to the meeting of the Long Parliament, had been a continued course of oppression and treachery. Let those who applaud the Revolution and condemn the Rebellion, mention one act of James II. to which a parallel is not to be found in the history of his father. Let them lay their fingers on a single article in the Declaration of Right, presented by the two houses to William and Mary, which Charles is not acknowledged to have violated. He had, according to the testimony of his own friends, usurped the functions of the legislature, raised taxes without the consent of parliament, and quartered troops on the people in the most illegal and vexatious manner. Not a single session of parliament had passed without some unconstitutional attack on the freedom of debate. The right of petition was grossly violated. Arbitrary judgments, exorbitant fines, and unwarranted imprisonments, were grievances of daily and hourly occurrence. If these things do not justify resistance, the Revolution was treason; if they do, the Great Rebellion was laudable.

But, it is said, why not adopt milder measures? Why, after the king had consented to so many reforms, and renounced so many oppressive prerogatives, did the parliament continue to rise in their demands, at the risk of provoking a civil war? The ship-money had been given up. The star-chamber had been abolished. Provision had been made for the frequent convocation and secure deliberation of parliaments. Why not pursue an end confessedly good, by peaceable and regular means? We recur again to the analogy of the Revolution. Why was James driven from the throne? Why was he not retained upon conditions? He too had offered to call a free parliament, and to submit to its decision all the matters in dispute. Yet we praise our forefathers, who preferred a revolution, a disputed succession, a dynasty of strangers, twenty years of foreign and intestine war, a standing army, and a national debt, to the rule, however restricted, of a tried and proved tyrant. The Long Parliament acted on the same principle, and is entitled to the same praise. They could not trust the king. He had no doubt passed salutary laws. But what assurance had they that he would not break them? He had renounced oppressive prerogatives. But where was the security that he would not resume them? They had to deal with a man whom no tie could bind; a man who made and broke promises with equal facility; a man whose honour had been a hundred times pawned, and never redeemed.

Here, indeed, the Long Parliament stands on still stronger ground than the Convention of 1688. No action of James can be compared, for wickedness and impudence, to the conduct of Charles with respect to the Petition of Right. The Lords and Commons present him with a bill in which the constitutional limits of his power are marked out. He hesitates; he evades; at last he bargains to give his assent, for five subsidies. The bill receives his solemn assent. The subsidies are voted. But no sooner is the tyrant relieved, than he returns at once to all the arbitrary measures which he had bound himself to abandon, and violates all the clauses of the very act which he had been paid to pass.

For more than ten years the people had seen the rights, which were theirs by a double claim, by immemorial inheritance and by recent purchase, infringed by the perfidious king who had recognised them. At length circumstances compelled Charles to summon another parliament: another chance was given them for liberty. Were they to throw it away as they had thrown away the former? Were they again to be cozened by *le Roi le veut?* Were they again to advance their money on pledges which had been forfeited over and over again? Were they to lay a second Petition of Right at the foot of the throne, to grant another lavish aid in exchange for another unmeaning ceremony, and then to take their departure, till, after ten years more of fraud and oppression, their prince should again require a supply, and again repay it with a perjury? They were compelled to choose whether they would *trust* a tyrant or *conquer* him. We think that they chose wisely and nobly.

The advocates of Charles, like the advocates of other malefactors against whom overwhelming evidence is produced, generally decline all controversy about the facts, and content themselves with calling testimony to character. He had so many private virtues! And had James II. no private virtues? Was even Oliver Cromwell, his bitterest enemies themselves being judges, destitute of private virtues? And what, after all, are the virtues ascribed to Charles? A religious zeal, not more sincere than that of his son, and fully as weak and narrow-minded, and a few of the ordinary household decencies which half the tombstones in

England claim for those who lie beneath them. A good father! A good husband! — Ample apologies indeed for fifteen years of persecution, tyranny, and falsehood!

We charge him with having broken his coronation-oath — and we are told that he kept his marriage-vow! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates — and the defence is, that he took his little son on his knee, and kissed him! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good and valuable consideration, promised to observe them — and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning! It is to such considerations as these, together with his Vandyke dress, his handsome face, and his peaked beard, that he owes, we verily believe, most of his popularity with the present generation.

For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase, a good man but a bad king. We can as easily conceive a good man and an unnatural father, or a good man and a treacherous friend. We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual, leave out of our consideration his conduct in the most important of all human relations. And if, in that relation, we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of all his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel.

We cannot refrain from adding a few words respecting a topic on which the defenders of Charles are fond of dwelling. If, they say, he governed his people ill, he at least governed them after the example of his predecessors. If he violated their privileges, it was because those privileges had not been accurately defined. No act of oppression has ever been imputed to him, which has not a parallel in the annals of the Tudors. This point Hume has laboured, with an art which is as discreditable in a historical work as it would be admirable in a forensic address. The answer is short, clear, and decisive. Charles had assented to the Petition of Right. *He had renounced* the oppressive powers said to have been exercised by his predecessors, and he had renounced them for money. He was not entitled to set up his antiquated claims against his own recent release.

These arguments are so obvious, that it may seem superfluous to dwell upon them. But those who have observed how much the events of that time are misrepresented and misunderstood, will not blame us for stating the case simply. It is a case of which the simplest statement is the strongest.

The enemies of the parliament, indeed, rarely choose to take issue on the great points of the question. They content themselves with exposing some of the crimes and follies to which public commotions necessarily give birth. They bewail the unmerited fate of Strafford. They execrate the lawless violence of the army. They laugh at the Scriptural names of the preachers. Major-generals fleecing their districts; soldiers revelling on the spoils of a ruined peasantry; upstarts, enriched by the public plunder, taking possession of the hospitable firesides and hereditary trees of the old gentry; boys smashing the beautiful windows of cathedrals; Quakers riding naked through the market-place; fifth-monarchy-men shouting for King Jesus; agitators lecturing from the tops of tubs on the fate of Agag; — all these, they tell us, were the offspring of the Great Rebellion.

Be it so. We are not careful to answer in this matter. These

charges, were they infinitely more important, would not alter our opinion of an event which alone has made us to differ from the slaves who crouch beneath the sceptres of Brandenburgh and Braganza. Many evils, no doubt, *were* produced by the civil war. They were the price of our liberty. Has the acquisition been worth the sacrifice? It is the nature of the devil of tyranny to tear and rend the body which he leaves. Are the miseries of continued possession less horrible than the struggles of the tremendous exorcism?

If it were possible that a people brought up under an intolerant and arbitrary system could subvert that system without acts of cruelty and folly, half the objections to despotic power would be removed. We should, in that case, be compelled to acknowledge, that it at least produces no pernicious effects on the intellectual and moral character of a people. We deplore the outrages which accompany revolutions. But the more violent the outrages, the more assured we feel that *a revolution was necessary.* The violence of those outrages will always be proportioned to the ferocity and ignorance of the people: and the ferocity and ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live. Thus it was in our civil war. The rulers in the church and state reaped only that which they had sown. They had prohibited free discussion: they had done their best to keep the people unacquainted with their duties and their rights. The retribution was just and natural. If they suffered from popular ignorance, it was because they had themselves taken away the key of knowledge. If they were assailed with blind fury, it was because they had exacted an equally blind submission.

It is the character of such revolutions that we always see the worst of them at first. Till men have been for some time free, they know not how to use their freedom. The natives of wine countries are always sober. In climates where wine is a rarity, intemperance abounds. A newly liberated people may be compared to a northern army encamped on the Rhine or the Xeres. It is said that, when soldiers in such a situation first find themselves able to indulge without restraint in such a rare and expensive luxury, nothing is to be seen but intoxication. Soon, however, plenty teaches discretion; and after wine has been for a few months their daily fare, they become more temperate than they had ever been in their own country. In the same manner, the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy. Its immediate effects are often atrocious crimes, conflicting errors, scepticism on points the most clear, dogmatism on points the most mysterious. It is just at this crisis that its enemies love to exhibit it. They pull down the scaffolding from the half-finished edifice: they point to the flying dust, the falling bricks, the comfortless rooms, the frightful irregularity of the whole appearance; and then ask in scorn where the promised splendour and comfort is to be found? If such miserable sophisms were to prevail, there never would be a good house, or a good government, in the world.

Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy, who by some mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear, at certain seasons, in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise, were for ever excluded from participation in the blessings which she bestowed. But to those who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the beautiful and celestial form which was natural to her, accompanied their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy

in love and victorious in war.* Such a spirit is Liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her! And happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!

There is only one cure for the evils which newly acquired freedom produces—and that cure is *freedom!* When a prisoner first leaves his cell, he cannot bear the light of day:—he is unable to discriminate colours, or recognise faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations which have become half blind in the house of bondage. But let them gaze on, and they will soon be able to bear it. In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to conflict, and begin to coalesce. And at length a system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos.

Many politicians of our time are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition, that no people ought to be free till they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story, who resolved not to go into the water till he had learnt to swim! If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in slavery, they may indeed wait for ever.

Therefore it is that we decidedly approve of the conduct of Milton and the other wise and good men who, in spite of much that was ridiculous and hateful in the conduct of their associates, stood firmly by the cause of public liberty. We are not aware that the poet has been charged with personal participation in any of the blamable excesses of that time. The favourite topic of his enemies is the line of conduct which he pursued with regard to the execution of the King. Of that celebrated proceeding we by no means approve. Still we must say, in justice to the many eminent persons who concurred in it, and in justice more particularly to the eminent person who defended it, that nothing can be more absurd than the imputations which, for the last hundred and sixty years, it has been the fashion to cast upon the Regicides. We have throughout abstained from appealing to first principles—we will not appeal to them now. We recur again to the parallel case of the Revolution. What essential distinction can be drawn between the execution of the father and the deposition of the son? What constitutional maxim is there, which applies to the former and not to the latter? The king can do no wrong. If so, James was as innocent as Charles could have been. The minister only ought to be responsible for the acts of the sovereign. If so, why not impeach Jeffreys and retain James? The person of a king is sacred. Was the person of James considered sacred at the Boyne? To discharge cannon against an army in which a king is known to be posted, is to approach pretty near to regicide. Charles, too, it should always be remembered, was put to death by men who had been exasperated by the hostilities of several years, and who had never been bound to him by any other tie than that which was common to them with all their fellow-citizens. Those who drove James from his throne, who seduced his army, who alienated his friends, who first imprisoned

* Orlando Furioso, canto 43.

him in his palace, and then turned him out of it, who broke in upon his very slumbers by imperious messages, who pursued him with fire and sword from one part of the empire to another, who hanged, drew, and quartered his adherents, and attainted his innocent heir, were his nephew and his two daughters! When we reflect on all these things, we are at a loss to conceive how the same persons who, on the fifth of November thank God for wonderfully conducting his servant King William, and for making all opposition fall before him until he became our King and Governor, can, on the thirtieth of January, contrive to be afraid that the blood of the Royal Martyr may be visited on themselves and their children.

We do not, we repeat, approve of the execution of Charles; not because the constitution exempts the king from responsibility, for we know that all such maxims, however excellent, have their exceptions; nor because we feel any peculiar interest in his character, for we think that his sentence describes him with perfect justice as "a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a public enemy;" but because we are convinced that the measure was most injurious to the cause of freedom. He whom it removed was a captive and a hostage: his heir, to whom the allegiance of every royalist was instantly transferred, was at large. The Presbyterians could never have been perfectly reconciled to the father: they had no such rooted enmity to the son. The great body of the people, also, contemplated that proceeding with feelings which, however unreasonable, no government could safely venture to outrage.

But, though we think the conduct of the regicides blamable, that of Milton appears to us in a very different light. The deed was done. It could not be undone. The evil was incurred; and the object was to render it as small as possible. We censure the chiefs of the army for not yielding to the popular opinion; but we cannot censure Milton for wishing to change that opinion. The very feeling which would have restrained us from committing the act, would have led us, after it had been committed, to defend it against the ravings of servility and superstition. For the sake of public liberty, we wish that the thing had not been done, while the people disapproved of it. But, for the sake of public liberty, we should also have wished the people to approve of it when it was done. If any thing more were wanting to the justification of Milton, the book of Salmasius would furnish it. That miserable performance is now with justice considered only as a beacon to word-catchers who wish to become statesmen. The celebrity of the man who refuted it, the "Æneæ magni dextra," gives it all its fame with the present generation. In that age the state of things was different. It was not then fully understood how vast an interval separates the mere classical scholar from the political philosopher. Nor can it be doubted that a treatise which, bearing the name of so eminent a critic, attacked the fundamental principles of all free governments, must, if suffered to remained unanswered, have produced a most pernicious effect on the public mind.

We wish to add a few words relative to another subject on which the enemies of Milton delight to dwell — his conduct during the administration of the Protector. That an enthusiastic votary of liberty should accept office under a military usurper, seems, no doubt, at first sight, extraordinary. But all the circumstances in which the country was then placed were extraordinary. The ambition of Oliver was of no vulgar kind. He never seems to have coveted despotic power. He at first

fought sincerely and manfully for the parliament, and never deserted it till it had deserted its duty. If he dissolved it by force, it was not till he found that the few members who remained after so many deaths, secessions, and expulsions, were desirous to appropriate to themselves a power which they held only in trust, and to inflict upon England the curse of a Venetian oligarchy. But even when thus placed by violence at the head of affairs, he did not assume unlimited power. He gave the country a constitution far more perfect than any which had at that time been known in the world. He reformed the representative system in a manner which has extorted praise even from Lord Clarendon. For himself, he demanded, indeed, the first place in the commonwealth; but with powers scarcely so great as those of a Dutch stadtholder or an American president. He gave the parliament a voice in the appointment of ministers, and left to it the whole legislative authority — not even reserving to himself a veto on its enactments. And he did not require that the chief magistracy should be hereditary in his family. Thus far, we think, if the circumstances of the time, and the opportunities which he had of aggrandising himself be fairly considered, he will not lose by comparison with Washington or Bolivar. Had his moderation been met by corresponding moderation, there is no reason to think that he would have overstepped the line which he had traced for himself: but when he found that his parliaments questioned the authority under which they met, and that he was in danger of being deprived of the restricted power which was absolutely necessary to his personal safety, then, it must be acknowledged, he adopted a more arbitrary policy.

Yet, though we believe that the intentions of Cromwell were at first honest,—though we believe that he was driven from the noble course which he had marked out for himself, by the almost irresistible force of circumstances,— though we admire, in common with all men of all parties, the ability and energy of his splendid administration, — we are not pleading for arbitrary and lawless power, even in his hands. We know that a good constitution is infinitely better than the best despot; but we suspect that, at the time of which we speak, the violence of religious and political enmities rendered a stable and happy settlement next to impossible. The choice lay, not between Cromwell and liberty, but between Cromwell and the Stuarts. That Milton chose well, no man can doubt who fairly compares the events of the protectorate with those of the thirty years which succeeded it, — the darkest and most disgraceful in the English annals. Cromwell was evidently laying, though in an irregular manner, the foundations of an admirable system. Never before had religious liberty and the freedom of discussion been enjoyed in a greater degree. Never had the national honour been better upheld abroad, or the seat of justice better filled at home. And it was rarely that any opposition, which stopped short of open rebellion, provoked the resentment of the liberal and magnanimous usurper. The institutions which he had established, as set down in the Instrument of Government, and the Humble Petition and Advice, were excellent. His practice, it is true, too often departed from the theory of these institutions. But, had he lived a few years longer, it is probable that his institutions would have survived him, and that his arbitrary practice would have died with him. His power had not been consecrated by ancient prejudices; it was upheld only by his great personal qualities: little, therefore, was to be dreaded from a second Protector, unless he were also a second Oliver Cromwell. The events which followed his decease are the most complete vindication of those who

exerted themselves to uphold his authority: for his death dissolved the whole frame of society. The army rose against the parliament, the different corps of the army against each other. Sect raved against sect. Party plotted against party. The presbyterians, in their eagerness to be revenged on the independents, sacrificed their own liberty, and deserted all their old principles. Without casting one glance on the past, or requiring one stipulation for the future, they threw down their freedom at the feet of the most frivolous and heartless of tyrants.

Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush — the days of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love; of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The king cringed to his rival, that he might trample on his people, sunk into a viceroy of France, and pocketed, with complacent infamy, her degrading insults, and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the measures of a government which had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the "anathema maranatha" of every fawning dean. In every high place, worship was paid to Charles and James — Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race, accursed of God and man, was a second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nations.

Most of the remarks which we have hitherto made on the public character of Milton, apply to him only as one of a large body. We shall proceed to notice some of the peculiarities which distinguished him from his contemporaries. And, for that purpose, it is necessary to take a short survey of the parties into which the political world was at that time divided. We must premise, that our observations are intended to apply only to those who adhered, from a sincere preference, to one or to the other side. At a period of public commotion, every faction, like an Oriental army, is attended by a crowd of camp-followers, an useless and heartless rabble, who prowl round its line of march in the hope of picking up something under its protection, but desert it in the day of battle, and often join to exterminate it after a defeat. England, at the time of which we are treating, abounded with such fickle and selfish politicians, who transferred their support to every government as it rose, — who kissed the hand of the king in 1640, and spit in his face in 1649, — who shouted with equal glee when Cromwell was inaugurated in Westminster Hall, and when he was dug up to be hanged at Tyburn, — who dined on calves' head or on broiled rumps, and cut down oak-branches or stuck them up, as circumstances altered, without the slightest shame or repugnance. These we leave out of the account. We take our estimate of parties from those who really deserved to be called partisans.

We would speak first of the Puritans, the most remarkable body of men, perhaps, which the world has ever produced. The odious and ridiculous parts of their character lie on the surface. He that runs may read them; nor have there been wanting attentive and malicious observers to point them out. For many years after the Restoration, they were the theme of unmeasured invective and derision. They were exposed to the utmost licentiousness of the press and of the stage, at the time when the press and the stage were most licentious. They were not

men of letters; they were as a body unpopular; they could not defend themselves; and the public would not take them under its protection. They were therefore abandoned, without reserve, to the tender mercies of the satirists and dramatists. The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff posture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the scriptural phrases which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed fair game for the laughers. But it is not from the laughers alone that the philosophy of history is to be learnt. And he who approaches this subject should carefully guard against the influence of that potent ridicule which has already misled so many excellent writers.

"Ecco il fonte del riso, ed ecco il rio
Che mortali perigli in se contiene:
Hor qui tener a fren nostro desio,
Ed esser cauti molto a noi conviene."*

Those who roused the people to resistance, — who directed their measures through a long series of eventful years, — who formed, out of the most unpromising materials, the finest army that Europe had ever seen, — who trampled down king, church, and aristocracy, — who, in the short intervals of domestic sedition and rebellion, made the name of England terrible to every nation on the face of the earth, were no vulgar fanatics. Most of their absurdities were mere external badges, like the signs of freemasonry, or the dresses of friars. We regret that these badges were not more attractive. We regret that a body, to whose courage and talents mankind has owed inestimable obligations, had not the lofty elegance which distinguished some of the adherents of Charles I., or the easy good-breeding for which the court of Charles II. was celebrated. But, if we must make our choice, we shall, like Bassanio in the play, turn from the specious caskets, which contain only the death's head and the fool's head, and fix our choice on the plain leaden chest which conceals the treasure.

The Puritans were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an over-ruling Providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know him, to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to commune with him face to face. Hence originated their contempt for terrestrial distinctions. The difference between the greatest and meanest of mankind seemed to vanish, when compared with the boundless interval which separated the whole race from Him on whom their own eyes were constantly fixed. They recognised no title to superiority but his favour; and, confident of that favour, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of heralds, they felt assured that they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not

* Gerusalemme Liberata, xv. 57.

accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands; their diadems crowns of glory which should never fade away! On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt: for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand. The very meanest of them was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged — on whose slightest action the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away. Events which short-sighted politicians ascribed to earthly causes, had been ordained on his account. For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed his will by the pen of the evangelist and the harp of the prophet. He had been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the sweat of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly sacrifice. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had arisen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God!

Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men, the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker: but he set his foot on the neck of his king. In his devotional retirement, he prayed with convulsions, and groans, and tears. He was half maddened by glorious or terrible illusions. He heard the lyres of angels, or the tempting whispers of fiends. He caught a gleam of the beatific vision, or woke screaming from dreams of everlasting fire. Like Vane, he thought himself intrusted with the sceptre of the millennial year. Like Fleetwood, he cried in the bitterness of his soul that God had hid his face from him. But when he took his seat in the council, or girt on his sword for war, these tempestuous workings of the soul had left no perceptible trace behind them. People who saw nothing of the godly but their uncouth visages, and heard nothing from them but their groans and their whining hymns, might laugh at them. But those had little reason to laugh who encountered them in the hall of debate or in the field of battle. These fanatics brought to civil and military affairs a coolness of judgment, and an immutability of purpose, which some writers have thought inconsistent with their religious zeal, but which were in fact the necessary effects of it. The intensity of their feelings on one subject made them tranquil on every other. One overpowering sentiment had subjected to itself pity and hatred, ambition and fear. Death had lost its terrors, and pleasure its charms. They had their smiles and their tears, their raptures and their sorrows, but not for the things of this world. Enthusiasm had made them stoics, and cleared their minds from every vulgar passion and prejudice, and raised them above the influence of danger and of corruption. It sometimes might lead them to pursue unwise ends, but never to choose unwise means. They went through the world, like Sir Artegale's iron man Talus with his flail, crushing and trampling down oppressors, mingling with human beings, but having neither part nor lot in human infirmities; insensible to fatigue, to pleasure, and to pain; not to be pierced by any weapon, not to be withstood by any barrier.

Such we believe to have been the character of the Puritans. We perceive the absurdity of their manners. We dislike the sullen gloom of their domestic habits. We acknowledge that the tone of their minds was often injured by straining after things too high for mortal reach: and we know that, in spite of their hatred of popery, they too often fell into the worst vices of that bad system, intolerance and extravagant austerity, — that they had their anchorites and their crusades, their Dunstans and their De Montforts, their Dominics and their Escobars. Yet, when all circumstances are taken into consideration, we do not hesitate to pronounce them a brave, a wise, an honest, and a useful body.

The Puritans espoused the cause of civil liberty mainly because it was the cause of religion. There was another party, by no means numerous, but distinguished by learning and ability, which co-operated with them on very different principles. We speak of those whom Cromwell was accustomed to call the Heathens, men who were, in the phraseology of that time, doubting Thomases or careless Gallios with regard to religious subjects, but passionate worshippers of freedom. Heated by the study of ancient literature, they set up their country as their idol, and proposed to themselves the heroes of Plutarch as their examples. They seem to have borne some resemblance to the Brissotines of the French Revolution. But it is not very easy to draw the line of distinction between them and their devout associates, whose tone and manner they sometimes found it convenient to affect, and sometimes, it is probable, imperceptibly adopted.

We now come to the Royalists. We shall attempt to speak of them, as we have spoken of their antagonists, with perfect candour. We shall not charge upon a whole party the profligacy and baseness of the horse-boys, gamblers, and bravoes, whom the hope of licence and plunder attracted from all the dens of Whitefriars to the standard of Charles, and who disgraced their associates by excesses which, under the stricter discipline of the parliamentary armies, were never tolerated. We will select a more favourable specimen. Thinking, as we do, that the cause of the King was the cause of bigotry and tyranny, we yet cannot refrain from looking with complacency on the character of the honest old Cavaliers. We feel a national pride in comparing them with the instruments which the despots of other countries are compelled to employ, — with the mutes who throng their antechambers, and the janissaries who mount guard at their gates. Our royalist countrymen were not heartless dangling courtiers, bowing at every step, and simpering at every word. They were not mere machines for destruction dressed up in uniforms, caned into skill, intoxicated into valour, defending without love, destroying without hatred. There was a freedom in their subserviency, a nobleness in their very degradation. The sentiment of individual independence was strong within them. They were indeed misled, but by no base or selfish motive. Compassion and romantic honour, the prejudices of childhood, and the venerable names of history, threw over them a spell potent as that of Duessa; and like the Red-Cross Knight, they thought that they were doing battle for an injured beauty, while they defended a false and loathsome sorceress. In truth they scarcely entered at all into the merits of the political question. It was not for a treacherous king or an intolerant church that they fought; but for the old banner which had waved in so many battles over the heads of their fathers, and for the altars at which they had received the hands of their brides. Though nothing could be more erroneous than their political opinions, they possessed, in a far greater degree than their

adversaries, those qualities which are the grace of private life. With many of the vices of the Round Table, they had also many of its virtues,—courtesy, generosity, veracity, tenderness, and respect for women. They had far more both of profound and of polite learning than the Puritans. Their manners were more engaging, their tempers more amiable, their tastes more elegant, and their households more cheerful.

Milton did not strictly belong to any of the classes which we have described. He was not a Puritan. He was not a freethinker. He was not a Cavalier. In his character the noblest qualities of every party were combined in harmonious union. From the Parliament and from the Court, from the conventicle and from the Gothic cloister, from the gloomy and sepulchral circles of the Roundheads, and from the Christmas revel of the hospitable Cavalier, his nature selected and drew to itself whatever was great and good, while it rejected all the base and pernicious ingredients by which those finer elements were defiled. Like the Puritans, he lived

"As ever in his great Taskmaster's eye."

Like them, he kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge and an eternal reward. And hence he acquired their contempt of external circumstances, their fortitude, their tranquillity, their inflexible resolution. But not the coolest sceptic or the most profane scoffer was more perfectly free from the contagion of their frantic delusions, their savage manners, their ludicrous jargon, their scorn of science, and their aversion to pleasure. Hating tyranny with a perfect hatred, he had nevertheless all the estimable and ornamental qualities which were almost entirely monopolised by the party of the tyrant. There was none who had a stronger sense of the value of literature, a finer relish for every elegant amusement, or a more chivalrous delicacy of honour and love. Though his opinions were democratic, his tastes and his associations were such as harmonise best with monarchy and aristocracy. He was under the influence of all the feelings by which the gallant Cavaliers were misled. But of those feelings he was the master, and not the slave. Like the hero of Homer, he enjoyed all the pleasures of fascination; but he was not fascinated. He listened to the song of the Syrens; yet he glided by without being seduced to their fatal shore. He tasted the cup of Circe; but he bore about him a sure antidote against the effects of its bewitching sweetness. The illusions which captivated his imagination never impaired his reasoning powers. The statesman was proof against the splendour, the solemnity, and the romance, which enchanted the poet. Any person who will contrast the sentiments expressed in his Treatises on Prelacy, with the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture and music in the Penseroso, which was published about the same time, will understand our meaning. This is an inconsistency which, more than any thing else, raises his character in our estimation; because it shows how many private tastes and feelings he sacrificed, in order to do what he considered his duty to mankind. It is the very struggle of the noble Othello. His heart relents; but his hand is firm. He does nought in hate, but all in honour. He kisses the beautiful deceiver before he destroys her.

That from which the public character of Milton derives its great and peculiar splendour still remains to be mentioned. If he exerted himself to overthrow a forsworn king and a persecuting hierarchy, he exerted himself in conjunction with others. But the glory of the battle which he fought for that species of freedom which is the most valuable, and

which was then the least understood, the freedom of the human mind, is all his own. Thousands and tens of thousands among his contemporaries raised their voices against ship-money and the star-chamber. But there were few indeed who discerned the more fearful evils of moral and intellectual slavery, and the benefits which would result from the liberty of the press and the unfettered exercise of private judgment. These were the objects which Milton justly conceived to be the most important. He was desirous that the people should think for themselves, as well as tax themselves; and be emancipated from the dominion of prejudice, as well as from that of Charles. He knew that those who, with the best intentions, overlooked these schemes of reform, and contented themselves with pulling down the king and imprisoning the malignants, acted like the heedless brothers in his own poem, who, in their eagerness to disperse the train of the sorcerer, neglected the means of liberating the captive. They thought only of conquering, when they should have thought of disenchanting.

> "Oh, ye mistook! Ye should have snatch'd his wand!
> . . . . without his rod reversed,
> And backward mutters of dissevering power,
> We cannot free the Lady that sits here
> In stony fetters fix'd, and motionless."

To reverse the rod, to spell the charm backward, to break the ties which bound a stupified people to the seat of enchantment, was the noble aim of Milton. To this all his public conduct was directed. For this he joined the Presbyterians—for this he forsook them. He fought their perilous battle; but he turned away with disdain from their insolent triumph. He saw that they, like those whom they had vanquished, were hostile to the liberty of thought. He therefore joined the Independents, and called upon Cromwell to break the secular chain, and to save free conscience from the paw of the Presbyterian wolf.* With a view to the same great object, he attacked the licensing system, in that sublime treatise which every statesman should wear as a sign upon his hand, and as frontlets between his eyes. His attacks were, in general, directed less against particular abuses, than against those deeply seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded, the servile worship of eminent men, and the irrational dread of innovation.

That he might shake the foundations of these debasing sentiments more effectually, he always selected for himself the boldest literary services. He never came up in the rear when the outworks had been carried, and the breach entered. He pressed into the forlorn hope. At the beginning of the changes, he wrote with incomparable energy and eloquence against the bishops. But, when his opinion seemed likely to prevail, he passed on to other subjects, and abandoned prelacy to the crowd of writers who now hastened to insult a falling party. There is no more hazardous enterprise than that of bearing the torch of truth into those dark and infected recesses in which no light has ever shone. But it was the choice and the pleasure of Milton to penetrate the noisome vapours, and to brave the terrible explosion. Those who most disapprove of his opinions must respect the hardihood with which he maintained them. He, in general, left to others the credit of expounding and defending the popular parts of his religious and political creed. He took his own stand upon those which the great body of his countrymen repro-

* Sonnet to Cromwell.

bated as criminal, or derided as paradoxical. He stood up for divorce and regicide. He ridiculed the Eikon. He attacked the prevailing systems of education. His radiant and beneficent career resembled that of the god of light and fertility, —

> "Nitor in adversum; nec me, qui cætera, vincit
> Impetus, et rapido contrarius evehor orbi."

It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages, compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the Paradise Lost has he ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." *

We had intended to look more closely at these performances, to analyse the peculiarities of the diction, to dwell at some length on the sublime wisdom of the Areopagitica, and the nervous rhetoric of the Iconoclast, and to point out some of those magnificent passages which occur in the Treatise of Reformation, and the Animadversions on the Remonstrant. But the length to which our remarks have already extended renders this impossible.

We must conclude. And yet we can scarcely tear ourselves away from the subject. The days immediately following the publication of this relic of Milton appear to be peculiarly set apart, and consecrated to his memory. And we shall scarcely be censured if, on this his festival, we be found lingering near his shrine, how worthless soever may be the offering which we bring to it. While this book lies on our table, we seem to be contemporaries of the great poet. We are transported a hundred and fifty years back. We can almost fancy that we are visiting him in his small lodging; that we see him sitting at the old organ beneath the faded green hangings; that we can catch the quick twinkle of his eyes, rolling in vain to find the day; that we are reading in the lines of his noble countenance the proud and mournful history of his glory and his affliction! We image to ourselves the breathless silence in which we should listen to his slightest word; the passionate veneration with which we should kneel to kiss his hand and weep upon it; the earnestness with which we should endeavour to console him, if indeed such a spirit could need consolation, for the neglect of an age unworthy of his talents and his virtues; the eagerness with which we should contest with his daughters, or with his Quaker friend Elwood, the privilege of reading Homer to him, or of taking down the immortal accents which flowed from his lips.

These are perhaps foolish feelings. Yet we cannot be ashamed of them; nor shall we be sorry if what we have written shall in any degree excite them in other minds. We are not much in the habit of idolising either the living or the dead. And we think that there is no more certain indication of a weak and ill-regulated intellect than that propensity which, for want of a better name, we will venture to christen *Boswellism*. But *there are* a few characters which have stood the closest

* The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy, book ii.

scrutiny and the severest tests, which have been tried in the furnace and have proved pure, which have been weighed in the balance and have not been found wanting, which have been declared sterling by the general consent of mankind, and which are visibly stamped with the image and superscription of the Most High. These great men we trust that we know how to prize; and of these was Milton. The sight of his books, the sound of his name, are refreshing to us. His thoughts resemble those celestial fruits and flowers which the Virgin Martyr of Massinger sent down from the gardens of Paradise to the earth, distinguished from the productions of other soils, not only by their superior bloom and sweetness, but by their miraculous efficacy to invigorate and to heal. They are powerful, not only to delight, but to elevate and purify. Nor do we envy the man who can study either the life or the writings of the Great Poet and Patriot, without aspiring to emulate, not indeed the sublime works with which his genius has enriched our literature, but the zeal with which he laboured for the public good, the fortitude with which he endured every private calamity, the lofty disdain with which he looked down on temptations and dangers, the deadly hatred which he bore to bigots and tyrants, and the faith which he so sternly kept with his country and with his fame.

DANTE. *

The limits of a late Number † precluded us from entering, as fully as we would have wished, into the subject of Dante. We resume it the more willingly, from our having just received a work, published two or three years ago in Italy, but almost unknown in England, having for its object to ascertain, whether this great poet was an inventor, or an imitator only. The continental antiquaries and scholars have eagerly laid hold of a manuscript, said to have been discovered about the beginning of the present century, and affording evidence, according to some persons, that he had borrowed from others the whole plan and conception of his wonderful work. The question, indeed, is of ancient date; and, long before such value had been set upon this manuscript, was so perplexed and prolonged, as now to call for definitive elucidation. We trust we shall place our readers in a condition to decide it for themselves.

An extract, or rather a short abstract, of an old Vision, written in Latin, appeared in a pamphlet published at Rome in 1801, with an insinuation that the primitive model of Dante's poem had at length been discovered. Some reader of new publications transmitted the intelligence of this discovery to a German journalist, who received it as of the utmost importance; and from him, a writer in a French paper, (the *Publiciste* of

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* Inquiry into the Originality of Dante's Poetry. By F. Cancellieri. — Vol. xxx. p. 317. September, 1818.

† No. lviii. Art. ix. p. 453. In the article here referred to, there is an interesting sketch of the commentators on Dante, with some admirable observations on the works of that distinguished poet. The reader will find critical remarks on Dante's poetry in various parts of the Edinburgh Review. See Vol. i. p. 307. Vol. xxiv. p. 49. Vol. xlii. p. 316.

July, 1809,) transcribed, embellished, and diffused it over all Europe, through the medium of his universal language. Having nothing to do with politics, every body received it upon the faith of the author of the pamphlet, by whom alone the old manuscript had been read; and it was immediately settled, among the wits and critics of the day, that Dante was but the versifier of the ideas of others. Mr. *Cancellieri*, a professed black-letter scholar, and animated, no doubt, with a laudable zeal for religion as well as literature, published the Vision entire in 1814, on the return of his Holiness to Rome. He accompanied it with an Italian translation, the whole comprising some sixty pages, preceded by twice that number of pages of his own remarks. In this ample dissertation, the question, however, is merely glanced at; — and all that its readers can make out with certainty is, that the learned author had selected this curious subject chiefly to astonish the world by his multifarious erudition, in a book which might have been not inaptly entitled — "*De rebus omnibus, et de quibusdam aliis.*" It must be acknowledged, however, that, amidst the unbounded variety of his citations, we meet with some things which it is agreeable to know; but they have so little to do with Dante, that we are really but little beholden to him on the present occasion; and have been obliged to refer to many other authorities, in order to disentangle ourselves from the perplexities into which he had brought us.

Mr. Cancellieri apprizes us that there existed two famous *Alberics*, both monks of Monte-Cassino; but he thought it immaterial to add, that the first was one of the few monks to whom the civilisation of the world is not without obligations — he having, in the midst of the barbarism of the eleventh century, written treatises upon logic, astronomy, and music.* His works probably contributed more to form the mind of Dante, than the *Visions* of the other to form the plan of his poem.

The latter Alberic was born about the year 1100, soon after the death of the former. When in his ninth year, he fell sick, and remained in a lethargy for nine days. Whilst in this state, a dove appeared to him, and catching him by the hair, lifted him up to the presence of St. Peter, who, with two angels, conducted the child across purgatory, and, mounting thence from planet to planet, transported him into Paradise, there to contemplate the glory of the blessed. His vision restored him to perfect health; — the miraculous cure was published to the world; — the monks received the child at Monte-Cassino; — and, because he repeated his vision tolerably well, and was of a rich family, they devoted him to St. Benedict, before he had reached his tenth year. He lived from that time in constant penitence, tasting neither flesh nor wine, and never wearing shoes; and the monastery had thus the glory of possessing a living saint, who, by his virtue, confirmed the belief that he had seen Purgatory and Paradise.

They took care to have the vision of Alberic reduced to writing, first by one of their own lettered brethren, and, some years after, by Alberic himself, assisted by the pen of Peter the Deacon, of whom there are yet remaining some historical pieces which occasionally throw light upon the darkness of that age. We subjoin what he says of Alberic in his own words.†

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* Mabillon, An. Bened. vol. v. b. 65.

† Tanta usque in hodiernum abstinentia, tanta morum gravitate pollet, ut pœnas peccatorum perspexisse, et pertimuisse, et gloriam sanctorum vidisse nemo quis dubitet: non enim carnem, non adipem, non vinum, ab illo tempore usque

If there existed but this one vision before the time of Dante, there might be some ground for presuming, that it suggested to him the idea of his poem. But the truth is, that such visions abounded from the very earliest ages of Christianity. St. Cyprian had visions, — St. Perpetua had visions, — and both, with many others, were declared divine by St. Augustine. The revelations of each turned upon the doctrine which each thought the best for establishing the faith. Accordingly, the creed written for the church over which he presided, by St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, was dictated to him in a vision by Saint John the Evangelist. But the zeal of the early bishops was soon replaced by the interested views of their successors. About the tenth century, the great object was, to establish the doctrine of Purgatory, in which the period of expiation was shortened in favour of souls, in proportion to the alms given by their heirs to the Church. The monk Alberic describes Purgatory with minuteness, and sees Hell only at a distance. All those visions having the same object, resembled each other; and whoever will take the trouble to examine the legends of the saints, and archives of the monasteries, will find hundreds, of the same epoch, and the same tenor. It may be said, that Dante either profited by all, or by none; but, if there be any one to which he can be supposed to be indebted more than another, it is the vision of an English monk, not named by any one that we know, though told circumstantially by Mathew Paris.* The English monk, like the Italian, gives no description of Hell, but, like Dante, describes his Purgatory as a mount; the passage from Purgatory to Paradise, a vast garden, intersected by delightful woods as in our poet: both had their visions in the holy week; — both allot the same punishments to the same infamous crimes, with some other points of resemblance, which those who are curious may find in Mathew Paris. The vision related by that historian suffices to give an idea of all the others; and proves, indeed, that there existed, at that time, a systematic style for working, in this way, upon popular credulity. The English monk also had his vision immediately after a long and dangerous malady, and in a state of lethargy and inanition, which lasted nine days, also followed by a miraculous cure.

It is sufficiently probable, that Dante had read the history of Mathew Paris, the historian having died before the birth of the poet; and still more probable, that he had read the vision of Alberic. The resemblance which we have pointed out between the visions of the two monks, and the infinity of other visions of the same kind, show that there was then established, in the popular belief, a sort of Visionary mythology, which Dante adopted in the same manner as the mythology of Polytheism had been adopted by Homer. Besides, the discovery of the manuscript of the Vision of Alberic, about which so much noise has been made for the last eighteen years, really took place about a century ago. It is mentioned, but without much stress, by Mazzuchelli, Pelli, and and Tiraboschi.† Mr. Bottari was the first who confronted it with the poem of Dante, in the year 1753; and the vanity which turns the heads of so many erudite persons, when they make discoveries to their own in-

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nunc, Deo annuente, assumpsit; calciamento nullo penitus tempore utitur; et sic, in tanta cordis, ac corporis contritione, et humilitate usque nunc in hodiernum, in hoc Casinensi cœnobio perseverat, ut multa illum quæ alios laterant vel metuenda, vel desideranda vidisse, etiamsi lingua taceret, vita loqueretur. (De Viris illustr. Casin.)

* Hist. Ang. ad an. 1196.

† Mazzuch. Scritt. It. vol. i. p. 290. Pelli Memor. p. 122. Tirab. Storia, &c. vol. iii. b. 4.

finite surprise, made him imagine he had discovered, in Dante, divers close imitations of the manuscript. The following is one of his great instances. Dante calls the Devil " the great worm," (Inferno, Cant. 31.) and therefore he must have copied from Alberic, who saw " a great worm that devoured souls." Monsignor Bottari was a prelate; the author of the pamphlet is a Benedictine abbot; Mr. Cancellieri is a good Catholic, and all three are antiquarians. How has it escaped them, that the Devil is called " the serpent" in the Scriptures, and that " worm" was constantly used for " serpent" by the old Italian writers? Shakspeare indeed uses it in the same sense, in " Anthony and Cleopatra;" and Johnson, in his note upon the passage, adduces a variety of other instances, in which the term was so employed. Another alleged imitation is, that in Purgatory an eagle grasps Dante with his talon, and raises him on high, in the same manner as Alberic had been caught by the hair, and lifted up by a dove. — Here, too, three pious persons have forgotten their Bible. In the two chapters of Daniel, retained in the Vulgate, Habakkuk is thus caught and lifted up by an angel; and the prophet Ezekiel says, chap. viii. v. 3., " And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head, and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God." It is certain that ingenuity and erudition will discover resemblances in things the most different from each other. In the passage of Sterne, which is so beautiful, so original, and so well known, of the recording angel washing out the oath with a tear, we doubt not that Dr. Ferriar would have detected a plagiarism from Alberic, had that ingenious person seen the eighteenth section of the manuscript. We give an abstract of the passage, for the use of the Doctor's next edition. " A demon holds a book, in which are written the sins of a particular man; and an angel drops on it, from a phial, a tear which the sinner had shed in doing a good action: and his sins are washed out."

It is possible that Dante may have taken some ideas here and there from the Visions which abounded in his age. There are involuntary plagiarisms, which no writer can wholly avoid, — for much of what we think and express is but a new combination of what we have read and heard. But reminiscences in great geniuses are sparks that produce a mighty flame; and if Dante, like the monks, employed the machinery of visions, the result only proves, that much of a great writer's originality may consist in attaining his sublime objects by the same means which others had employed for mere trifling. He conceived and executed the project of creating the Language and the Poetry of a nation — of exposing all the political wounds of his country — of teaching the Church and the States of Italy, that the imprudence of the Popes, and the civil wars of the cities, and the consequent introduction of foreign arms, must lead to the eternal slavery and disgrace of the Italians. He raised himself to a place among the reformers of morals, the avengers of crimes, and the asserters of orthodoxy in religion; and he called to his aid Heaven itself, with all its terrors and all its hopes, in what was denominated by himself —

—— " the sacred work, that made
Both Heaven and Earth copartners in his toil."

Il poema sacro
Al qual ha posto mano e Cielo e Terra.—Parad. Cant. 25.

To explain how he executed his vast design, it appears to us indispensable that we should give a slight sketch of the political and religious state of Italy at the period when he wrote.

Robertson has described Europe, in the middle ages, as peopled with slaves attached to the soil, who had no consolation but their religion: and this indeed was, for many centuries, the great instrument of good and of evil even in temporal concerns. The feudal lords were restrained only by the fear of Heaven, and the monarch had no army but such as that military aristocracy supplied: the canon law was the only instrument by which justice could oppose force; and that instrument was wielded only by the clergy. This last circumstance was the chief foundation of the great ascendency of the Popes. A strong yearning after justice and law instigated the people of Italy to become free; and the circumstances of the times were such, that for their freedom they were indebted to the Church. Robertson, however, as well as many others copying after Machiavelli, has erroneously ascribed the misfortunes of the succeeding generations to the authority usurped over princes by Gregory VII. The ill effects of that usurpation were not sensibly felt in Italy until a much later period; and the truth is, that Italian liberty and civilisation were greatly promoted by it in the first instance; and advanced by rapid strides, from the age of Gregory to that of Dante, a period of 200 years. The acts of that ambitious Pontiff, however, prolific as they were of important consequences to his country, require undoubtedly to be kept in view by all who would understand its history.

The daring schemes which he conceived and executed in a few years, and in his old age, may be said to have been accomplished by the use of the single word — Excommunication. By this talisman, he compelled the sovereigns of his day to acknowledge, that all the lands in their dominions allotted for the support of the clergy belonged in property to the Pope; and our England was the first that made the concession: two Italians at that time successively enjoyed the see of Canterbury for nearly forty years.* By this notable device, the Church at once acquired a very large portion of all the cultivated lands of Europe; for the monks had very generally employed themselves in clearing and cultivating the soil — received large donations from potentates and kings — and had thus become wealthy and powerful proprietors. By this act of annexation, however, they became the immediate subjects of the pope; and a great portion of the riches of Europe began, in consequence, to flow in upon Italy.

The next of Gregory's gigantic measures was, if possible, still more bold and important, and this was the absolute prohibition of marriage to all the orders of the priesthood. He had here to struggle with the inclinations of the clergy themselves, and of the Italian clergy in particular. But when the difficulty was once overcome, the advantage gained was prodigious — to the order itself — to the popedom — and to the country which was its seat. The great brotherhood of the Catholic clergy, receiving their subsistence directly from the Church — exempted from secular jurisdiction, and now loosened from all the ties of natural affection, — must have felt themselves but feebly attached to their respective countries, and looked almost exclusively, as they taught their fellow-citizens to look, to Rome as the place which was to give law to the world.

The last grand project of Gregory was that of the Crusades†, which, though he did not live long enough to carry into execution, he left to his successor already matured and digested. Then it was that kings became subalterns in command, fighting with their subjects in Asia during half a

* Lanfranc and St. Anselm, from 1070 to 1109.

† This appears by two of his own letters. See Collect. of Labbeus.

century, under orders issued from Rome; and Rome and Italy became, of course, the centre of influence and authority. All these advantages, however, would have been of but little value, without freedom; and of this, also, the sovereign Pontiff happened to be the first dispenser: — for Gregory, in his first experiment of excommunication, released the Italians from their oath of fealty to the Emperor, who had previously governed them as vassals.

It is under these circumstances that we behold, immediately after the death of this Pope, and even in his lifetime, the cities of Italy suddenly improving in population, wealth, and power — palaces of independent magistrates rising to view where there were before but hamlets and slaves — and republics starting forth as if out of nothing. The holy war had delivered Europe in general from the slavery of the soil; every man who took up arms for the crusade became free; and the labourer in Italy began to till the earth on his own account. The military aristocracies and monarchies being employed with their armed forces in distant expeditions, had no longer the same oppressive preponderance at home. The maritime preparations for the crusades were undertaken by the cities of Italy — danger nerved the courage of every class — and navigation, by opening the exportation of manufactures, increased industry, wealth, and knowledge. Florence, for example, supplied all nations with her woollen cloths; and Milan furnished all the arms used by the crusaders, and the princes of Europe. The latter city, at that period of her liberty, had a population triple what it is at the present day. It was said the country was depopulated to supply the manufactures in the towns. But how could so many millions have been subsisted without agriculture? It was then that Italy crowded every port with her gallies, and every market with her merchandise. The wealth thus resulting from commerce served to divide and distribute the property of the land, and to multiply the number of those interested in maintaining the laws and independence of their country. The enormous inequality of fortunes disappeared, and the weight of the capitalists was opposed to the ascendency of the ancient nobles. It was then that the people of Pisa became masters of the Balearic, and discovered the Canary islands — that Genoa was fortified with strong walls in the space of two months — that Milan, and other towns of Lombardy, having seen their children massacred, their houses and churches burned, their habitations rased — and, having been reduced to live two years unsheltered in the fields, — resumed their arms, routed Frederick Barbarossa, who returned with a formidable force, and compelled him to sign the peace of Constance, acknowledging their independence.

During all this time, it is true that most of those States were engaged in civil wars: but they had arms in their hands; and when the common enemy appeared, they knew how to join in defending their common liberties. The Italians, having thrown off the foreign yoke, gave their aid to the Popes, who were constantly occupied in conflicts with the Emperors; and the Church had thus an interest in favouring independence and democracy. But, by degrees, she became tired of using the arms of the Italian States as her defence, though the safest and most natural for her to employ; and, having contributed towards the liberty of Italy, thought she had the right to invade it. Excommunications had then been hurled against friends and enemies, till they began to be less formidable; and the Popes adopted the policy of introducing foreign conquerors, and sharing their conquests. It was then that they and the

kings of France became constant and close allies. In the lifetime of Dante, a French prince, aided by the Pope, came for the first time into Italy, usurping the states of old dynasties in the name of the Holy See — promising liberty, and preaching concord to republics, but in fact dividing still more, in order to enslave them. The *Guelfi* professed themselves supporters of the Church, and the *Ghibelini* of the Empire, but without much caring for the one or the other. The true question between them was, whether the wealthy citizens or the people should govern the state; and, in the continual danger of foreign invasion, the popular party found its interest in attaching itself to the Church and to France against Germany, whilst the higher classes were more interested in joining the Emperors against the Popes and the French. From the political conduct of Dante when a magistrate, it is evident that he condemned the madness of both parties; for he sent the leaders of both into banishment. But it is also clear that he was more afraid of France than of Germany, and not over fond of democracy.

The true reason of his exile was his refusal to receive a prince of France sent by Boniface VIII., under the pretext of pacifying their dissensions. After his exile, he openly embraced the Ghibeline party, and composed a Latin treatise, *De Monarchia*, to prove that all the misfortunes of Italy sprang from the false doctrine, that the Popes had a right to interfere in temporal concerns. France having, at the time, contrived that the Popes should reside at Avignon, for the purposes of more absolute control, and Frenchmen having been successively raised to the Holy See, as being more devoted to French interests, our poet addressed a letter to the Cardinals from his exile, recommending strongly that they should elect an Italian Pope.* It was with those views, and under those circumstances, in so far as politics were concerned, that he wrote his poem.

But, notwithstanding the corruption and senseless ambition of the Church, and its consequent unpopularity, Religion still maintained its primitive influence. The first crusade raised almost all Europe in arms, by an opinion, suddenly diffused, that the end of the world and the general judgment were at hand, and that the holy war was the sole expiation of sins. These enterprises had been abandoned during the lifetime of our poet; but the dread of the end of the world continued to agitate Christendom for eighty years after his death. Leonardo Aretino, a historian known for the extent of his knowledge, and the share he had in the affairs of Italy and Europe, was an eye-witness of an event which took place in 1400. We shall give his account translated *verbatim*.

" In the midst of the alarms and troubles of the wars, either begun or impending between the States of Italy, an extraordinary occurrence took place. All the inhabitants of each state dressed themselves in white. This multitude went forth with extreme devotion. They passed to the neighbouring states, humbly craving peace and mercy. Their journey lasted usually ten days; and their food during this time was bread and water. None were seen in the towns that were not dressed in white. The people went without danger into an enemy's country, whither, a few days before, they would not have dared to approach. No one ever thought of betraying another, and strangers were never insulted. It was a universal truce tacitly understood between all enemies. This lasted for about two months; but its origin is not clear. It was confidently affirmed to have come down from the Alps into Lombardy, whence it spread with astonishing rapidity over all Italy. The inhabitants of Lucca were the first who came in a

* Giovanni Villani, b. 9. chap. 134.

body to Florence. Their presence suddenly excited an ardent devotion, to such a degree that even those who, at the commencement, treated this enthusiasm with contempt, were the first to change their dress and join the procession, as if they were suddenly impelled by a heavenly inspiration. The people of Florence divided themselves into four parties; two of which, consisting of a countless multitude of men, women, and children, went to Arezzo. The remaining two took other directions, and, wherever they came, the inhabitants dressed themselves in white, and followed their example. During the two months that this devotion lasted, war was never thought of; but, no sooner had it passed away, than the people resumed their arms, and the previous state of agitation was renewed." *Aret. Hist. Flor.* b. 12. c. 1.

Such, in that age, was the force of religion; and Dante, therefore, naturally employed its terrors as the most effective means of touching the passions of his contemporaries. But religion, in Italy especially, was overgrown with heresies and schisms, which often produced the most sanguinary conflicts. Saint Francis founded his order about the beginning of the 13th century; and preached the faith, according to the doctrines of the Church of Rome, in opposition to the sects which the Italian chronicles of that age call Valdesi, Albigesi, Cattari, and Paterini, but more commonly by the latter name. These four sects were all in the main Manicheans. At the same time, St. Dominick arrived from Spain, carrying fire and sword wherever his opinions were disputed. It was he who founded the Inquisition; and was himself the first *magister sacri palati*, an office always held at Rome, even in our own time, by a Dominican, who examines new books, and decides upon their publication. Before the institution of those two orders, the monks were almost all of the different rules of St. Benedict, reformed by St. Bernard and other abbots. But, being occupied in tilling the land, or in perusing manuscripts of ancient authors,—in fine, never going beyond their convents, unless to become the ministers of kingdoms, where they sometimes exercised kingly power,—their wealth, education, and even pride, rendered them unfit for the business of running from place to place, and employing hypocrisy, impudence, and cruelty, in the service of the Popes. St. Bernard, by his eloquence and rare talents, exercised great influence over kings and pontiffs. He succeeded in firing Europe to undertake the crusade; but, to give durability to the opinions he produced, there was still wanting the pertinacity and roguery of the mendicant friars, to exhibit to the people spectacles of humility and privation, and of *auto-da-fé*. They had their convents in towns, and spread themselves over the country: whilst the Benedictines were living like great feudal lords in their castles. Hence, the Italians carefully make the distinction of *Monaci* and *Frati*. The former were always more or less useful to agriculture, remarkable for the luxury in which they lived, receiving amongst them only persons of condition for the most part, and each congregation having a sort of monarchical constitution, of which the abbot was absolute chief. The constitution of the Frati was, on the other hand, at all times more or less democratic. They have always been meddling with affairs of state, and family affairs —

"*Scire volunt secreta domus atque inde timeri.*"

The Jesuits, who have been lately re-established, are also mendicant *Frati*. Notwithstanding their great wealth, they observed the form, in order to preserve the right of begging, by sending out their *conversi* (lay-brothers) with sacks, three or four times a year, to beg for their convents. Having been established three centuries later than the others, they took

advantage of this, to give refinement to the arts, and to avoid the faults of those who preceded them. Mathew Paris, who was nearly contemporary with Saint Francis and Saint Dominick, has given pictures of their new flocks, which might be taken for an abstract of all that has been written from the days of Pascal to the present, concerning the Jesuits. "The people," says he, "called them hypocrites and successors of antichrist, pseudo-preachers, flatterers and counsellors of kings and princes, despisers and supplanters of bishops, violators of royal marriage-beds, prevaricators of confessions, who, wandering over unknown provinces, minister to the audacity of sin." (*Ad an.* 1256, p. 939. *Edit.* 1640.) It is inconceivable what an ascendency was exercised by the Dominicans and Franciscans in the time of our poet over the passions of individuals, the opinions of the people, and the powers of the State. The Franciscan, Fra Giovanni di Vicenza, possessed unbounded authority in Lombardy, changing the laws, leading towns and provinces in his train; instigating the civil animosities of that unhappy people in obedience to the fatal policy of the Popes; and, when harangues and intrigues failed, making himself obeyed by *auto-da-fé*. By a document published not long since by Mr. Marini, it appears that *auto-da-fé* were multiplied by the Dominicans, even beyond the wishes and orders of the court of Rome. It is a brief of Pope Benedict XI., dated the 11th of March, 1304, and addressed to the Inquisitors of Padua, ordering them to reverse their iniquitous sentences, and to go on with their trade of preaching and burning, in such a manner, that the outcries of the people should no longer reach his ears. Benedict XI. was himself a Dominican; and perhaps wished, like many other sovereigns, to profit by the injustice of his agents, without appearing to be a party.

At the very time that these friars were setting the example of the most infamous vices, they appear also to have originated the most sacrilegious heresies. The mendicants not only continued to cry up their innumerable antiquated visions, but invented new ones still more absurd, which they continued to have revealed, sworn to, and believed. The University of Paris was for several years agitated, Europe scandalised, and the Vatican occupied, without knowing how to extricate itself, with a long trial of the Dominicans for a singular attempt, aided by a Franciscan fanatic, to substitute the prophetic visions of the Abbé Joachim, with some supplements of their own, for the New Testament. Mathew Paris, either from not being exactly informed of what was passing abroad, or not daring to state all he knew, speaks of this circumstance only in general terms. "They preached," says he, "commented, and taught certain novelties, which, as far as they were known, were considered mere ravings, and reduced those into a book, which they were pleased to style 'The Everlasting Gospel;' with certain other things, of which it would not be wise to say too much." (*Hist. Ang. ad an.* 1257.) But he has said quite enough to confirm the discoveries subsequently made by writers of every communion, respecting this extraordinary fact, and to make known in what state Dante found the religion of Europe. The Inquisitors, in the mean time, were by no means remiss in burning astrologers, and persons accused of practising the art of magic, though it sometimes happened that an astrologer triumphed over them. Of two contemporaries of Dante, one, Cecco d'Ascoli, was burned by order of the Dominican Inquisition at Florence *; and the other, Pietro d'Abano, who was reputed to be confederate with devils, and openly professed astrology, upon being accused

* Gio. Villani, b. 10. chap. 39.

at Paris, retorted the charge of heresy upon the Dominicans — summoned them to appear — convicted them of heresy by forty-five special arguments — procured their expulsion and exclusion from Paris for a considerable period — and was himself pronounced innocent by the Pope at Rome.* The people, however, believed in the power of this magician. It is mentioned in the chronicles of that age, and still repeated in the villages of Padua, that Pietro had seven spirits at his command; and that when he was going to be hanged, he substituted an ass in his place. The fact is, that notwithstanding his canonical absolution, Pietro had admitted in his writings the influence of the stars upon human actions, and denied absolutely the existence of demons.† The philosophy of Epicurus had made some progress among the higher orders in the age of Dante; Guido Cavalcanti, his intimate friend, was pointed out by the people for his Meditations against the Existence of God.

Thus were the grossest abuses of superstition and fanaticism mingled with heretical license, uncertainty of opinion, popular credulity and atheism; and, nevertheless, Religion was still the great centre around which all the passions and interests of mankind revolved. In this singular condition of society, Boniface, in the last year of the thirteenth century, proclaimed a plenary indulgence to all who should make a pilgrimage to Rome. All Christendom was accordingly attracted towards the holy city; and, during several weeks, 200,000 foreigners were calculated to succeed each other daily ‡ at its gates. To give all possible solemnity and effect to the lessons he proposed to inculcate, Dante fixed the epoch of his Vision of Divine Justice in the holy week of that year, when all Europe thus went forth to obtain the remission of sins.

We have thus endeavoured to fill up some of the *lacunæ* in the work of Mr. Cancellieri; and trust we have, at the same time, negatived many of the trite and visionary conjectures that have been hazarded upon the sources whence our poet might have derived the idea of his work.§ There are, however, some recent authors, whose writings are deservedly popular, of whose opinions it may be right to say something. Denina has gone the length of supposing, that Dante borrowed his plan from a masquerade which took place during a public festival at Florence, in which devils and damned souls were represented as characters. This strange drama was exhibited on a bridge over the Arno, which, being made of wood, gave way during the show, and closed the scene most tragically. Now, it appears from Villani, that Dante had left Florence two years before; and, previously to his departure, had composed the seven first cantos of his poem, which were saved by his wife when his house was pillaged and destroyed by the faction that persecuted him. The manuscript, by Boccacio's account, was sent to him in his exile, in 1302; and the masquerade of "The Damned Souls" was represented in 1304. The truth, therefore, is probably the very reverse of Denina's conjecture,— that the idea of the show was suggested to the people of Florence by the beginning of their fellow-citizen's poem. Tiraboschi and Mr. Sismondi,

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* Michael Savonarola, ad an. 1292. 1299. Petri Abani conciliator, differentia 10.

† This curious observation was first made by Pico of Mirandola. See *De rerum Prænotatione*, sect. 5.

‡ Maratori, Annali, ad. an. 1300.

§ Romance of Guerino — Saint Patrick's Pit — The Juggler who goes to Hell — The Dream of Hell — The Road to Hell — and three Tales of the 12th and 13th Centuries, to be found in the old French *Fabliaux*.

indeed, are both of this opinion; and we may add that, even in 1295, Dante, in his little work, entitled "La Vita Nuova," gives distinct hints of the design of his great poem.

Our poet was the pupil of Brunetto Latini, who, in a sort of poem, entitled the *Tesoretto*, supposes himself guided by Ovid through the mazes of a forest, in search of the oracles of nature and philosophy; and from this model it is confidently asserted, that the pupil loses himself in a forest, and takes Virgil for his guide. That Mr. Corniani should dilate upon this fine discovery, is very natural,— for, of all the historians of Italian literature, he is the most quackish and the most inept. But it is lamentable that it should be repeated with even more confidence by Mr. Ginguené. He is "astonished, that no Italian before Mr. Corniani suspected this to be the origin of Dante's poem;"— and we are astonished, in our turn, that Mr. Ginguené should not know this suspicion to be as old as the year 1400. It may be collected, indeed, from the biographical account of Dante, by Philip Villani, nephew to the illustrious historian of that name; and was advanced more boldly by others a few years after, and at a longer interval.* Federigo Ubaldini says, in the preface to his edition of the Tesoretto in 1642 — "Aver Dante imitato il Tesoretto di Brunetto Latini." Mr. Ginguené, too, we may say, has been much too favourable in his judgment of the Tesoretto, which is really a very mean and scarcely intelligible performance. Though written six hundred years ago, we suspect there are but few persons who have read it in all that time. Would it be credited, that Count Mazzuchelli, and Father Quadrio, the two Italian writers who have most carefully explored the old authors, had but an imperfect knowledge of the Tesoretto, even while they were busy disputing about it? Both writers, misled by the resemblance of name, mention it as an abridgement of the *Tesoro*, which is in fact the great work of Brunetto Latini, but has nothing whatever, either in conception or matter, in common with the Tesoretto. The Tesoro, besides, is written in French, and in prose. Monsignor Fontanini, who is occasionally bewildered by his admiration of what is old, calls the Tesoretto — "Poesia cristiana, nobile e morale." Its orthodoxy we do not dispute. But, for nobleness, we can see nothing but the reverse. And as to its morality, it consists entirely in a string of maxims, or rather proverbs, without imagery, sentiment, or a single spark of animation. It is, moreover, disfigured by grammatical inaccuracies, vulgarisms of phrase, and a great number of words, so obscure, as not to be found even in the dictionary of La Crusca. That Academy, which was certainly disposed to do full justice to the efforts of the early Florentine writers, and was instituted for the purpose of examining them with more care, has characterised the Tesoretto in three words —"Poesia a foggia di frottola" (poetry in the trivial ballad style).

After all this, we should scarcely have expected to meet with a passage like the following in so learned and correct an author as Mr. Hallam: —"The source from which Dante derived the scheme and general idea of his poem, has been a subject of enquiry in Italy. To his original mind, one might have thought the sixth Æneid would have sufficed. But it happens, in fact, that he took his plan, with more direct imitation than we should expect, from the Tesoretto of his master in philosophical studies, Brunetto Latini. This is proved by Mr. Ginguené, b. ii. p. 8." Even the authority is hastily quoted for this hasty opinion: for though it is true, that, in the place cited by Mr. Hallam, and elsewhere, the

* Vide Lor. Mehus, vita del Traversari, p. 153.

French critic has made the assertion here imputed to him, it is very remarkable, that, in the succeeding volume, this *certainty* is reduced to *probability*. Mr. Ginguené there says only, "that Dante gave grandeur and poetic colouring to the ideas of his master, Brunetto,—*if indeed he borrowed any from him; and similar ideas were not dictated to him by the nature of his subject.*" (Vol. ii. p. 27.) And at last this great discovery dwindles into a mere *possibility;* for Mr. Ginguené, in giving some extracts from the Tesoretto, is reduced to the avowal, "that it is at least *possible* Dante may have profited by it." (P. 8.) The truth is, that such inaccuracies and inconsistencies are almost inevitable in treating of a foreign literature; and especially of a literature so copious and peculiar as the Italian. The history of its eminent writers is entangled in the dissensions of the different provinces—the systems of their different schools—their religious opinions, and not infrequently the political interests of their several masters. Hence, in order to appreciate the force or the value of their expressions, it is often necessary to have an accurate knowledge of the different systems of literary education, of manners, of revolutions, of governments, and, often, even of the personal character and design of each writer. In Italy, too, it should be remembered, that there has not for centuries been any political freedom, and that the people have been studiously kept in ignorance. Flattery and satire have accordingly been chiefly in request—while party spirit and imposture have had full play. The number of readers, at the same time, is so limited, as to consist almost wholly of *protegés*, patrons, and rivals; and the men of letters, who might expose imposture, and bring truth to light, have rarely been able to speak without danger. We have already observed, that the Jesuits usurped every branch of polite literature; and that, to serve the cause of the Popes, they systematically decried Dante, with the other noblest geniuses of Italy. Nevertheless, the history of the Jesuit Tiraboschi, is (with very few exceptions) the constant model of Mr. Ginguené, who in fact has done little more than impart a more lively colouring to the original design of that learned but prejudiced person. In the execution of this humble task, however, he now and then gets so bewildered as to be unjust to his model:—for example, he actually charges Tiraboschi "with having confounded the Tesoro with the Tesoretto" (vol. ii. p. 8.);—while the fact is, that Tiraboschi was the very person who first exposed this blunder of Mazzuchelli and Quadrio, to which we have already adverted. (*Storia Lett.* vol. iv. lib. 3. c. 5.) The French, however, are apt, we suspect, to fall into such perplexities. The Abbé de Sades, in his Memoirs of the Life of Petrarca, relates of that poet—"that, to avoid a winter passage *over the mountains between Milan and Venice*, he postponed his journey," &c. (vol. iii. p. 345.) Now, we shall not venture to say what might have been the state of that country anterior to the deluge; but of this we are certain, that in no author, ancient or modern, always excepting M. de Sades, is there the least mention of mountains between Milan and Venice—a tract of country so flat, as to be called, in the chronicles of the time of Petrarca—"La Valle Lombarda."—The key to the whole is, that the Abbé had never been in Italy,—and that Mr. Ginguené wrote in the same predicament; having never penetrated beyond Turin, where he went as ambassador in the time of the republic. We must not wonder, therefore, if he should now and then make a slip—but he might have avoided quoting foreign as native authority. "Pour ne point alleguer ici," observes Mr. Ginguené (vol. i. p. 25.), "d'autorités suspectes; c'est encore dans *les Italiens* que

je puiserais:" and incontinently he cites a passage of *Mr. Andres*, who certainly writes in Italian, but is *a Spaniard!* — and, moreover, generally considered in Italy as neither very well acquainted with its literature, nor very just to it.

The work of Mr. Frederick Schlegel, which has been very lately translated into English, is another instance of the hazards of all peremptory criticism on the character of foreign writers. The German author has entitled his book — "*Lectures on the History of Literature, ancient and modern.*" He is graciously pleased to represent Dante as "the greatest of Italian and of Christian poets," — but observes, at the same time, that "*the Ghibeline harshness* appears in Dante in a form noble and dignified. But although it may perhaps do no injury to the outward beauty, it certainly mars, in a very considerable degree, the internal charm of his poetry. His chief defect is, in a word, *the want of gentle feelings.*" Now, the opinion of Mr. Hallam is directly opposite to that of this learned Theban. "In one so highly endowed by nature," observes Mr. Hallam, "and so consummate by instruction, we may well sympathise with a resentment which exile and poverty rendered perpetually fresh. But the heart of Dante was naturally *sensible* and *even tender:* his poetry is full of comparisons from rural life; and the sincerity of his early passion for Beatrice pierces through the veil of allegory that surrounds her. But the memory of his injuries pursued him into the immensity of eternal light; and, in the company of saints and angels, his unforgiving spirit darkens at the name of Florence." It would be presumption in us to determine — between Mr. Schlegel and Mr. Hallam — which has read Dante with more care; but the poem itself, we think, affords sufficient evidence that the English critic has the truer sense of its character — and is most in unison with the soul of the poet, which was fraught even to redundance with "gentle feelings," and poured them out, on every occasion, with a warmth and delicacy perhaps unequalled in any other writer. We must, however, remind even Mr. Hallam, that Dante does not always, in his poem, mention his country with resentment; and, in his prose work, "Il Convito," he remembers Florence with the most affectionate tenderness. He styles the injustice of his fellow-citizens towards himself a fault, not a crime, — and offers up a pathetic prayer, "that his bones might repose at last in the soft bosom of that land which had nursed and borne him to the maturity of his age." — We subjoin his own words, for the satisfaction of those who are sufficiently conversant with Italian to feel the beauty of the original, and who will thence readily concur in the truth of our observation: — "Ahi! piaciuto fosse al Dispensatore dell' Universo che la cagione della mia scusa mai non fosse stata! Che nè altri contro me avria fallato, nè io sofferto avrei pena ingiustamente; pena, dico, d'esilio e di povertà, poichè fu piacere dei cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gittarmi fuori del suo dolce seno, nel quale nato e nudrito fui fino al colmo della mia vita; e nel quale, con buona pace di quella, desidero con tutto il cuore di riposare l'animo stanco, e terminare il tempo che mi è dato."

Mr. Schlegel, however, is not the only person who has imputed harshness of soul to Dante. This, indeed, is a sort of traditional censure, derived from the fastidious critics of the court of Leo X.; for our poet, it must be confessed, was

> ..... *minus aptus acutis*
> *Naribus horum hominum* .....

..... *at est vir bonus, ut melior*
Non alius quisquam, at ingenium ingens.

It is a distinctive trait in the character of the earlier poets, that they continually reveal to us in their writings the inmost feelings and dispositions of their souls. They, as it were, say to the reader—

Tibi nunc, hortante Camœnâ,
Executienda damus præcordia.

But, in order to obtain just views of those characteristic feelings, their poems should be read through and through; whereas the generality of critics content themselves with a few popular passages, and judge of the rest according to the response of some of those oracles, who, like Cardinal Bembo, have had the art or the good fortune to make their *dicta* pass current as authority. Dante is, perhaps, the poet most spoken of, and least read by foreigners. It may, therefore, be proper to select a few passages from the many that might be found in his poem, to prove that his heart was as much distinguished for gentleness as for magnanimity and force.

The haughtiness of demeanour, attributed to him by all the writers from Giovanni Villani to the present day, probably is not exaggerated. He was naturally proud; and when he compared himself with his contemporaries, he felt his own superiority, and took refuge, as he expresses it himself with so much happiness—

Sotto l'usbergo del sentirsi puro.
Conscience makes me firm;
The boon companion, *who her strong breastplate*
Buckles on him that feels no guilt within,
And bids him on, and fear not.

Nevertheless, this inflexibility and pride, melt at once into the softest deference and docility, when he meets those who have claims upon his gratitude or respect. In conversing with the shade of Brunetto Latini, who was damned for a shameful crime, he still attends his master with his head bent down—

Il capo chino
Tenea, com' uom che riverente vada—
Held my head
Bent down as one who walks in reverent guise.

We believe it has never been remarked that Dante, who makes it a rule, in conversing with all others, to employ the pronoun *tu* (thou), uses the pronoun *voi* (you) in addressing his preceptor Brunetto, and his mistress Beatrice. Even Mr. Cary has not seized this shade of distinction, and translates

Sete voi *qui, ser Brunetto—*
—by— Sir! Brunetto!
And art *thou* here?

Our poet has even carried modesty so far as not to pronounce his own name; and upon one occasion, when he was asked who he was, did not say that he was Dante; but whilst he described himself in such a manner as to give an exalted opinion of his genius, ascribed all the merit to love, by which he was inspired—

..... *io mi son un, che quando*
Amore spira, noto; e a quel modo
Che detta dentro, vo significando.

Count of me but as one
Who am the scribe of Love, that, when he breathes,
Take up my pen, and, as he dictates, write.

Yet when the beloved Beatrice addresses him, as if to reproach him with his past life—

Dante!
Non pianger anco, non pianger ancora;
Che pianger ti convien per altra spada—
Dante, weep not;
Weep thou not yet;—behoves thee feel the edge
Of other sword, and thou shalt weep for that;

he writes his own name, lest he should alter or omit a single word that fell from the lips of her he loved; yet, even for this, he thinks it necessary to excuse himself—

Quando mi volsi, al suon del nome mio
Che di necessità quì si rigistra—
Turning me at the sound of mine own name,
Which here I am compelled to register.

This repugnance to occupy his readers with his own particular concerns (a repugnance of which we have certainly no reason to complain in the authors of the present day) has perhaps imposed upon Dante his singular silence respecting his family; whilst he records a variety of domestic anecdotes of almost all his acquaintance, and so forcibly paints the miseries of exile, he omits one grief the most cruel of all—that of a father without a house to shelter, or bread to feed his young and helpless children. It is beyond all doubt that he had several sons, and that they lived in a state of proscription and distress until the period of his death. But, for this fact, we are indebted only to the historians. From his own writings it could not be even suspected that he was a husband and a father.

It is, however, easy to perceive, that he is thinking of his family, when he exclaims, that the women of Florence, in older times, when purity of morals and civil concord prevailed, were not reduced to a life of widowhood whilst their husbands yet lived—or obliged to share with them the sufferings of their exile, without knowing in what place they should find a grave—

O fortunate, e ciascuna era certa
Della sua sepoltura—
Oh! happy they,
Each sure of burial in her native land.

It is not alone in his "comparisons drawn from rural life," as remarked by Mr. Hallam, but principally in what he says of social intercourse, and of the brighter days of his country, that we perceive the sensibility and gentleness of his nature. He delights in painting the joys of domestic life, of which he presents a most affecting picture in the 15th Canto of the Paradiso, whence we have taken the verses just quoted. He does not lament the loss of innocence and simplicity alone, but also of the refined luxury, the courtesy, the chivalrous spirit of gallantry and love, and the tone of high breeding in society, which in Italy, it seems, were then beginning to disappear.

The ladies and the knights, the toils and ease,
That witched us into love and courtesy.
Le donne, i cavalier', gli affanni e gli agi
Che ne invogliova amore e cortesia.

These two lines have such a charm to Italian ears, that Ariosto, after having sketched a thousand beginnings for his poem, and decided upon an indifferent one enough, which was printed, finally rejected them all in the second edition, and substituted, almost word for word, the verses of Dante, as follows—

Le donne, i cavalier, l'armi, gli amori
Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese, io canto.

But the slight change which it was necessary to make, destroyed the sweet harmony of the original; and the delicate sentiment of regret is wholly lost in the imitation. It is very rarely that the same ideas, or the same words, produce the same effect, when transplanted from the place into which they first dropped from the heart of a man of genius.

It is curious to see, how little novelty there is, even in the most modern of our elegant distresses. Dante, in the beginning of the 14th century, complains, that commerce having suddenly enriched numbers of mere clowns, society was corrupted and debased by an upstart aristocracy whose insolence and profusion had put to flight all courtesy of heart, and refinement of breeding—

An upstart multitude, and sudden gain,
Pride and excess, oh! Florence! have in thee
Engendered; so that now in tears thou mourn'st.

This is one of the many instances in which our poet mingles with stern justice of observation a sentiment of plaintive tenderness for his country. It will, we believe, be much more forcibly felt by those who understand the original.

La gente nuova e i subiti guadagni,
Orgoglio e dismisura han generata,
Fiorenza, in te! si che tu già ten piagni.

He has also the generosity to attribute to others the courtesy which was felt with so much nobleness, and expressed with so much sweetness, by himself. Upon his entrance into Purgatory, he meets his friend Casella, a celebrated musician, who died a short time before, and whom he deeply lamented.

Then one I saw, darting before the rest
With such fond ardour to embrace me, I
To do the like was moved: O, shadows vain,
Except in outward semblance! Thrice my hands
I clasped behind it; they as oft returned
Empty into my breast again: Surprise,
I need must think, was painted in my looks,
For that the shadow smiled and backward drew.
To follow it I hastened, but with voice
Of sweetness, it enjoined me to desist:
Then who it was I knew, and prayed of it
To talk with me it would a little pause:
It answered, "Thee as in my mortal frame
I loved, so loosed from it I love thee still,
And therefore pause; but why walkest thou here?"

We shall give neither the sequel nor the original of this dialogue. Even this feeble attempt at translation suffices to show, that it was dictated to a delicate mind by nature. At the close of their conversation, the poet asks his friend to sing.

Then I: "If new laws have not quite destroyed
Memory and use of that sweet song of long,
That whilom all my cares had power to 'suage,

Please thee with it a little to console
My spirit—
" Love that discourses in my thoughts." He then
Began, in such soft accents, that within
The sweetness thrills me yet.

These lines convey but a dim shadow of the grace and tenderness of the original.

Ed Io: " *Se nuova legge non ti toglie*
Memoria o uso all' amoroso canto,
Che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie;
Di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto
L' anima mia—
" *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*"—
Cominciò egli allor si dolcemente
Che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.

Dante, in the words " amoroso canto," asks his friend generally to sing him some strain that should excite in him feelings of tenderness and love; whilst in Mr. Cary's translation, the words " *that* song of love," seem rather to indicate some particular song, and thereby destroy the beauty and delicacy of the poet's idea; for the touch of courteous and gentle feeling which he imagines in his friend is, that Casella selects a song which Dante had himself written for Beatrice. This is not mentioned in the poem; but we have found the Canzone, of which the opening is given here, among his lyric compositions.

Perhaps we have not correctly seized the acceptation in which the words " gentle feelings " are used by Mr. F. Schlegel. It is difficult for people to understand each other through the medium of a foreign language. We have before us a French translation of the *Inferno*, published a few years since in London, in which the translator complains " of not finding enough of *episodes* in the poem of Dante, and this radical vice of the poem," he says, " necessarily fatigues the most intrepid reader." Now, in as much as the whole poem, and particularly the *Inferno*, is a tissue of episodes, we are obliged to conclude that, in French literature, the word *episode* means something very different from what is generally understood. We have, however, too many frightful examples before us, to enter into discussions relating to a foreign language. Mr. Ginguené, who has treated Italian literature with more zeal and candour, and who was generally better qualified than many who have undertaken the same task, is, we regret to repeat, one of those examples. The simile of Dante (Inf. Cant. 1.)

E come quei che con lena affannata,
Uscito fuor del pelago alla riva,
Si volge all' acqua perigliosa, e guata, *

is translated by Mr. Ginguené, " *Comme un voyageur hors d'haleine, descendu sur le rivage, tourne ses regards vers la mer où il a couru tant de dangers.*" In the original, the question is not about a traveller at sea, but about a man who saves himself by swimming. He reaches the shore, after having despaired of escape, and when at the very last gasp. The words " fuor del pelago" present the man to our imagination as if he had been just vomited up by the ocean; and the concluding verse places

* And as a man with difficult short breath
Forespent with toiling, 'scaped from sea to shore
Turns to the perilous wide waste, and stands
At gaze. (*Cary's translat.*)

him in that sort of stupor which is felt upon passing at once to safety from despair, without any intervention of hope. He looks back upon perdition with a stare, unconscious how he had escaped it. The word "guata" which ends the stanza and the sentence, presents all this, as if by magic, to the imagination of the reader, and leaves him in full possession of the image which the poet had conjured up by his genius.

Such observations may appear too minute and particular; but it is in things like this that the peculiar merit of Dante consists. He condenses all his thoughts and feelings in the facts he relates, and expresses himself invariably by images, and those images often what the Italian painters call *in iscorcio*. Even his largest groups are composed of a very few strokes of the pencil, and in none does he ever stop to fill up the design with minute or successive touches, but passes hastily on through the boundless variety of his subject, without once pausing to heighten the effect, or even to allow its full developement to the emotion he has excited. A single word, flung in apparently without design, often gives its whole light and character to the picture. Thus, in the third Canto of the Purgatorio, the poet gazes with fixed eyes upon the shades as they move over the mountain. One stands still and addresses him.

Then of them one began—"Whoe'er thou art
Who journey'st thus this way, thy visage turn.
Think if me elsewhere thou hast ever seen."
I towards him turn'd, and with fix'd eyes beheld.
Comely and fair and gentle of aspéct
He seem'd; but on one brow a gash was mark'd;
When humbly I disclaim'd to have beheld
Him ever. "Now behold," he said; and show'd,
High on his breast, a wound; then smiling, spake,
"I am Manfredi."

E un di loro incominciò, chiunque
Tu se', cosi andando volgi 'l viso,
Pon mente, se di là mi vedesti unque.
Io mi volsi ver lui, e guardail fiso,
Biondo era, e bello, e di gentile aspetto;
Ma l'un de' cigli un colpo avea diviso.
Quando mi fui umilmente disdetto
D'averlo visto mai, el disse: Or vedi;
E mostrommi una piaga a sommo il petto,
Poi sorridendo *disse: Io son Manfredi.*

Manfredi was the most powerful prince of Italy, and the chief support of the Ghibeline party; and fell on the field of battle in the flower of his age. The Pope had his bones dug up and exposed, in order that they might be "*washed by the rain, and stirred by the wind.*"* It is easy to imagine what Dante felt at the sight of this ill-fated and youthful hero. We look to find a eulogy upon him; but the poet, in his own person, speaks not of Manfredi. It is by the single word *sorridendo* that the reader is moved to admiration and to pity. Dante employs but that one touch, to express the magnanimity of a hero SMILING, whilst he shows the wound that arrested him in his career of glory; and discovering, in that *smile*, his contempt of the vindictive fury of his enemies.

We shall add but one example more, to show the difficulty of explaining the beauties of Dante's composition by any general description. The passage we select is from the episode of "*Francesca da Rimini*," as being most familiar to the English reader, both from its own popu-

* Or le bagna la pioggia e muove il vento.

larity, and from the beautiful amplification of it which Mr. Hunt has lately given to the public. *Francesca* says to the poet,

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
Prese costui della bella persona
Che mi fu tolta; e' il modo ancor m' offende:
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
Mi prese del costui piacer sì forte
Che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona:
Amor condusse noi ad una morte.

Love, that in gentle heart is quickly learn'd,
Entangled him by that fair form, from me
Ta'en in such cruel sort, as grieves me still;
Love, that denial takes from none beloved,
Caught me with pleasing him so passing well,
That, as thou see'st, he yet deserts me not;
Love brought us to one death.

The whole history of woman's love is as highly and completely wrought, we think, in these few lines, as that of *Juliet* in the whole tragedy of Shakspeare. *Francesca* imputes the passion her brother-in-law conceived for her, not to depravity, but nobleness of heart in him*, and to her own loveliness. With a mingled feeling of keen sorrow and complacent *naïveté*, she says she was fair, and that an ignominious death robbed him of her beauty. She confesses that she loved, because she was beloved:—That charm had deluded her;—and she declares, with transport, that joy had not abandoned her even in hell:—

——— *piacer sì forte*
Che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

It is thus that Dante unites perspicuity with conciseness — and the most naked simplicity with the profoundest observation of the heart. Her guilty passion survives its punishment by Heaven — but without a shade of impiety. How striking is the contrast of her extreme happiness in the midst of torments that can never cease; when, resuming her narrative, she looks at her lover, and repeats with enthusiasm,

Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso —
——— he, who ne'er
From me shall separate.†

She nevertheless goes on to relieve her brother-in-law from all imputation of having seduced her. Alone, and unconscious of their danger, they read a love-story together. They gazed upon each other, pale with emotion—but the secret of their mutual passion never escaped their lips.

Per piu fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
Quella lettura, e scolorocci 'l viso;
Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

Oft-times by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
Fled from our alter'd cheek: But at one point
Alone we fell.

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* The words "*gentile*," and "*gentilezza*," as used by the best writers, from Dante to the present day, denote rather nobleness of soul than amiableness of manners. *Gentilezza* is a propensity towards all that is beautiful and generous; and is the alliance of delicacy of sentiment with high courage. Ariosto says, the lion *ha il cor gentile*.

† We think the word *questi*, in the original, more evidently conveys the idea that Francesca, when she used it, turned her eyes towards her lover, who was ever by her side.

We are sorry to say Mr. Cary has not translated these interesting passages with his usual felicity. The description of two happy lovers in the story was the ruin of Francesca. It was the romance of Lancilot and Ginevra, wife of Arthur, King of England. *

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
Esser baciato da cotanto amante,
Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso
La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
——When of that smile we read
The wish'd for smile, so rapturously kiss'd
By one so deep in love; then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd.

After this avowal, she hastens to complete the picture with one touch which covers her with confusion.

Quel giorno piu non vi leggemmo avante.
——That day,
We read no more!

She utters not another word!—and yet we fancy her before us, with her downcast and glowing looks; whilst her lover stands by her side, listening in silence and in tears. Dante, too, who had hitherto questioned her, no longer ventures to enquire in what manner her husband had put her to death; but is so overcome by pity, that he sinks into a swoon. Nor is this to be considered as merely a poetical exaggeration. It is remarked by the commentators, that the poet had himself often yielded to the force of love, and that the fear of his own damnation probably mingled with his compassion for Francesca, in producing this excessive emotion. This may be true—but it is but a part of the truth. Dante's whole work, though founded on what may be considered as an extravagant fiction, is conversant only with real persons. While other poets deal with departed or with fabulous heroes, he takes all his characters from among his countrymen, his contemporaries, his hosts, his relatives, his friends, and his enemies. Nor does he seek to disguise them under borrowed appellations. He gives, in plain words, the name and description and character of all those well known individuals. He converses with them—reminds them of their former friendship—and still seeks to mingle his sentiments with theirs. At the same time, he marks impartially the retribution to which he thinks their conduct has entitled them; while, with a singular mixture of human relenting, he is not prevented by their crimes, and consequent punishment in hell, from doing them honour—laying open to them his heart, and consoling them with his tears. If they had attended to those things, we think the commentators might have condescended to mention, that Francesca was the daughter of *Guido da Polenta*, master of Ravenna, Dante's protector and most faithful friend. The poet had probably known her when a girl, blooming in innocence and beauty under the paternal roof. He must, at least, have often heard the father mention his ill-fated child. He must therefore have recollected her early happiness, when he beheld the spectacle of her eternal torment; and this, we think, is the true account of the overwhelming sympathy with which her form overpowers him. The episode, too, was written by him in the very house in which she was born, and in

* Dante calls the author "*Galeotto;*" and, in the manuscripts of Boccaccio, his Decameron is found entitled "*Il principe Galeotto,*" apparently to apprise the reader of its being a dangerous book.

which he had himself, during the last ten years of his exile, found a constant asylum.

Boccaccio has given an account which greatly mitigates the crime of Francesca; and he insinuates, that still further particulars were known to Dante. He relates, that "*Guido* engaged to give his daughter in marriage to Lanciotto, the eldest son of his enemy the master of Rimini. Lanciotto, who was hideously deformed in countenance and figure, foresaw, that if he presented himself in person, he should be rejected by the lady. He therefore resolved to marry her by proxy, and sent, as his representative, his younger brother Paolo, the handsomest and most accomplished man in all Italy. Francesca saw Paolo arrive, and imagined she beheld her future husband. That mistake was the commencement of her passion. The friends of Guido addressed him in strong remonstrances and mournful predictions of the dangers to which he exposed a daughter, whose high spirit would never brook to be sacrificed with impunity. But Guido was no longer in a condition to make war; and the necessities of the politician overcame the feelings of the father." *

Dante abstained from employing any of those circumstances, though highly poetical. He knew that pathos, by being expanded over a number of objects, loses of its force. His design was to produce, not tragedies, but single scenes; and Francesca, to justify herself, must have criminated her father, and thus diminished the affecting magnanimity with which her character is studiously endowed by the poet.

To record this stain upon the illustrious family of a benefactor and a friend, may, in our eyes, appear indelicate and ungrateful; especially as it may be supposed, from his placing Francesca in Hell, that he meant to hold her up to execration. An observation which perhaps has not escaped the learned men of Italy, but which they have never expressed, from the dread of provoking the savage bigotry of their priests, explains this point. Dante constantly distinguishes between the *sins* and *merits* of each individual. *Divine Justice*, in his poem, punishes sin whenever it is actually committed; but *human sympathy*, or pity, laments or extenuates the offence, according to the circumstances under which it was committed. The poet dispenses censure and praise according to the general qualities of the persons — the good or evil they had done their country — the glory or the infamy they had left behind them. He, however, carefully abstains from laying down this maxim in words, whilst he invariably acts upon it both in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. In the *Paradiso*, there is plainly no room for its operation.

From this principle he has deduced, that those who have done neither good nor evil in their day are the most despicable of beings. They are described as

Questi sciaurati che mai non fur vivi —
These wretches who ne'er lived.

He places them between Hell, the abode of the damned, and Limbo, the abode of the souls of infants and good men ignorant of the Christian faith; and, with singular boldness of opinion as well as style, he says, *God*'s justice disdains to punish, and his mercy disdains to pardon, those who were useless in their lives.

Fama di lor nel mondo esser non lassa,
Misericordia e Giustizia li sdegna,
Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarde e passa.

* Opere del Boccaccio, vol. v. towards the end. Florence edition, 1721.

Fame of them the world hath none,
Nor suffers. Mercy and Justice scorn them both.
Speak not of them; but look, and pass them by.

Among those, he has had the boldness to place Saint Celestino, who abdicated the pontificate through weakness, and acquired his titles to canonisation in a hermit's cell. He also finds amongst them the angels that in the war of *Lucifer* against *God* took neither side, and thought only of themselves.

In those who merited that *God* should weigh their lives against their sins, Dante has generally implanted a strong desire of celebrity. The prospect of being named by the poet, on his return to the living, suspends awhile the sense of their pains. Great souls, though expiating the guilt and shamefulness of the heaviest sins, entreat him to mention his having seen them. This he always promises; and often, for the purpose of engaging them to speak with him more freely, pledges his faith that they shall not be forgotten. The shades of those only who in their lives were sunk in habitual crime and infamy, conceal from him their names. It is in the middle age, between barbarism and refinement, that men most strongly feel this desire of having their names preserved from oblivion. The passions, at that period, have yet lost no portion of their vigour, and are ruled by impulse rather than by calculation. Man has then more difficulties to rouse, and more courage to sustain him; and, rather than be checked in his course, will plunge with *éclat* into any gulf that opens in his way. Of this the age of Dante furnishes examples scarcely credible in an age like ours, in which nothing retains sufficient novelty to make a strong impression, and the objects of pursuit are so multiplied, that no one can excite a commanding interest. It is obvious, however, that the strong passions of less polished times bear men on to great virtues — great crimes — great calamities; and thus form the characters that are most proper for poetry. Dante had only to look round him for characters such as these. He found them already formed for his purpose, without the necessity of a single heightening touch from his own invention. Refinement had not yet produced that sameness of individual physiognomy in the great mass of a nation. Individual originality, now rare, dangerous, ridiculous, and often affected, was then common and undisguised. Poetry, in later times, has succeeded in catching its shades for the purposes of fine comedy — as in the *Misanthrope* of Molière; and of pretty satire — as in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. But all that this species of poetry can do, is to seize that exterior of character which every age and nation decks out after its own fashion; whilst the poetry, whose business is with the human heart, is coeval and co-extensive with human nature. Pope, accordingly, no sooner lighted, in an almost barbarous age, upon a poetical personage, governed both in action and in writing by feeling alone, than he produced the *Epistle of Eloisa*, and proved that he had genius. Many a woman of that day resembled *Eloisa* in her misfortunes and her love; but they left few, if any, letters behind them. Even those of *Eloisa* have reached us only by their connection with the writings of her lover. At present, the fair sex write much more, and perhaps feel as much less; and accordingly, our later poets, not finding poetical characters at home, are driven to seek for them in Turkey and in Persia; — while the Germans explore the ruins of Teutonic castles — and the Italians prudently confine themselves to the mythology of Greece and Rome. In fine, when nations are in a semi-barbarous state, the passions are their strongest laws: what else they have under the name of law, is

yet without consistency or force. The punishment of an injury is left to him who suffered it — and he regards vengeance as a duty. Dante concludes one of his lyric pieces with the following sentiment —

> How fair is the honour reaped from revenge!
> *Che bell' onor s'acquista in far vendetta.*

How strongly does its application to his own poem illustrate the character of his age! Though terrified, at every step, by the objects which Hell presents to his view, the sentiment of vengeance, as a duty, stops him in his course. His eyes are fixed upon a shade that seems to shun him. Virgil reminds him that they must continue their journey; and asks the reason of his delay. Dante answers, "If you knew the reason, you would allow me to remain longer; for in the pit, on which I fixed my eyes, I thought I beheld one of my kinsmen."—"Truly," rejoins Virgil, "I marked him pointing his finger at you, with a menacing and haughty air."—"Oh! my master," exclaims Dante; "he was killed by an enemy, and his death has not been yet revenged by any of those to whom that insult was given; and therefore he disdained to speak to me!" *

From those considerations, which we have been tempted to expand perhaps more than was necessary, it is, we think, evident, that the episode of Francesca was every way congenial to the principles, the poetry, and the affections of Dante, as well as to the age in which he lived. To satisfy *Divine Justice*, he, in fact, places her in Hell; but he introduces her in such a manner, that human frailty must pity her. Nature had given to her character the poetic cast. Her story, he knew, was one that could not be concealed; — and he gave the daughter of his friend the celebrity which popular tradition could not bestow. The husband of Francesca was living and powerful when Dante wrote; but the fearless vengeance of the poet devotes him to infamy; and foretells, that his place, named after Cain, among the fratricides, awaits him in the very centre of Hell. Indeed, the father of Francesca continued to afford protection to Dante, and not only attended his remains to the tomb, but composed and recited a funeral oration over them. His successors, too, defended the poet's sepulchre against the power of *Charles de Valois* king of Naples, and the Church — when *John XXII.* sent Cardinal *Bernardo di Poggetto* from Avignon to Ravenna, with orders to drag forth the bones of the poet from the repose of the grave, that they might be burned, and their ashes scattered before the wind. This, indeed, is mentioned only by Boccaccio in the life of Dante; and that piece of biography has been generally regarded as a romance. But the fact, we think, is completely verified in the works of *Bartolo*, a celebrated civilian, who was living at the time, and alludes to it very distinctly in treating of the law *de Rejudicandis Reis* (ad cod. l. 1. *cod. de Rejudic.* &c.).

The celebrity of the episode of Francesca, and the little light hitherto thrown upon it, has engaged us in a discussion, the unavoidable length of which is an additional proof that a commentary upon Dante, which should be useful in a historical and poetical view, still remains to be executed. We hasten now to the close of these desultory observations. But few literary men are acquainted with his lyric compositions; and his prose is scarcely ever mentioned. The elegant treatise written by him, to prove that in a nation, divided by so many dialects as Italy, it must be impossible to adopt the dialect of Florence exclusively, was the principal cause of the little value set by the academy of La Crusca and its adherents

* Hell, canto 29.

upon the prose of our poet. For La Crusca always maintained that the language should not be called Italian, or even Tuscan, but Florentine. Nevertheless, the literary language of Italy, though founded upon the Tuscan, is a distinct language, created by the commonwealth of authors, never spoken, but always written; as Dante had seen and foreseen. His own prose is a fine model of forcible and simple style, harmonious without studied cadences, and elegant without the affected graces of Boccaccio and his imitators. We venture upon a short specimen, extracted from the *Convito*, upon the subject to which we have alluded.

" Siccome non si può bene manifestare la bellezza d'una donna, quando li adornamenti dell' azzimare e delle vestimenta la fanno più annumerare che essa medesima. Onde chi vuole bene giudicare d'una donna, guardi quella, quando solo sua naturale bellezza si sta con lei, da tutto accidentale adornamento discompagnata; Siccome sarà questo volgare; nel quale si vedrà l'agevolezza delle sue sillabe, le proprietà delle sue condizioni, e le orazioni che di lui si fanno :—le quali chi bene guarderà, vedrà essere piene di dolcissima e d'amabilissima bellezza.

" A perpetuale infamia e depressione degli malvagi uomini d'Italia che commendano lo volgare altrui e il loro proprio dispregiano, dico, che la loro mossa viene di cinque abominevoli cagioni. La prima, è cecità di discrezione. La seconda, maliziata scusazione. La terza, cupidità di vanagloria. La quarta, argomento d'invidia. La quinta el'ultima, viltà d'animo, cio è pusillanimità. E ciascuna di queste reïtà ha si gran setta che pochi son quelli che sieno da essi liberi. Della prima si può cosi ragionare. Siccome la parte sensitiva dell' anima ha i suoi occhi co' quali apprende la differenza delle cose in quanto elle sono di fuori colorate, così la parte razionale ha il suo occhio, col quale apprende la differenza delle cose in quanto sono ad alcun fine ordinate, e questa è la discrezione. E siccome colui che è cieco degli occhi sensibili va sempre secondo che gli altri, così colui che è cieco del lume della discrezione, sempre va nel suo giudizio secondo il grido o diritto o falso. Onde qualunque ora lo guidatore è cieco, conviene che esso e quello anche cieco che a lui s'appoggia vengano a mal fine. Però è scritto ch' il cieco al cieco farà guida e cosi caderanno amendue nella fossa. Questa guida è stata lungamente contro a nostro volgare per le ragioni che di sotto si ragioneranno. Appresso dì questa i ciechi sopra notati, che sono quasi infiniti, con la mano in su la spalla a questi mentitori sono caduti nella fossa della falsa opinione, della quale uscire non sanno. Dell' abito di questa luce discretiva massimamente le popolari persone sono orbate, però che occupate dal principio della loro vita ad alcuno mestiere, dirizzano si l'animo loro a quella persona della necessità che ad altro non intendono. E però che l'abito di virtù, sì morale come intellettuale, subitamente avere non si può, ma conviene che per usanza s'acquisti, e elli la loro usanza pongono in alcuna arte, e a discernere l'altre cose non curano, impossibile è a loro discrezione avere. Perchè incontra che molte volte gridano viva la lor morte e muoja la lor vita, pur che alcuno cominci. E questo è pericolosissimo difetto nella loro cecità. Onde Boezio giudica lo popolare gloria vana perche la veda senza discrezione. Questi sono da chiamare pecore e non uomini. Che se una pecora si gettasse da una ripa di mille passi, tutte le altre l'anderebbono dietro. E se una pecora per alcuna cagione al passare d'una strada salta, tutte l'altre saltano, eziandio nulla veggendo di saltare. E io ne vidi già molte in un pozzo saltare per una che dentro vi saltò, forse credendo saltare un muro, non ostante ch'il pastore piangendo e gridando con le braccia e col petto dinanzi si parava. La seconda setta contro al nostro volgare si fa per una maliziata scusa. Molti sono che amano piu d'essere tenuti maestri, che d'essere; e per fuggire lo contrario cio è di non essere tenuti, sempre danno colpa alla materia dell' arte apparecchiata, ovvero allo strumento. Siccome il mal fabro biasima il ferro apresentato a lui; e lo mal Cetarista biasima la cetra; — credendo dar la colpa del mal coltello e del mal suonare al ferro e alla cetra, e levarla a sè. Cosi sono alquanti, e non pochi, che vogliono che l'uomo gli tenga dicitori, e per scusarsi del non dire, o dal dire male, accusano e incolpano la materia, cio è lo volgare proprio, e commendano l'altro, lo quale non è loro richiesto di fabricare. E chi vuole vedere come questo ferro si dee biasimare, guardi che opere ne fanno gli buoni e perfetti artefici e conoscerà la maliziata scusa di costoro che biasimando lui si cre-

dono scusare. Contro questi cotali grida Marco Tullio nel principio d'un suo libro che si chiama libro del Fine de'Beni. Pero che alsuo tempo biasimavano lo latino romano, e commendavano la grammatica Greca. E così dico per somiglianti cagioni che questi fanno vile lo parlare Italico; e prezioso quello de' Provenza," &c. &c.

The lyric poetry of Italy was not indeed invented or perfected, though greatly improved, by Dante. It is mentioned by himself in his prose works, that "lyric composition had been introduced above a century before, by Sicilian poets, into Italy;" from which time it was gradually cultivated, down to Guido Cavalcanti, who produced some very fine essays — the finest until those of Dante, who in that kind was, in his turn, surpassed by Petrarca. But still the germs of all that is most enchanting in the strains of Laura's lover may be found in the verses which had previously celebrated Beatrice. The following is the opening of the canzone which his friend Casella so courteously sang to him in Purgatory:—

Amor che nella mente mi ragiona
Della mia donna sì soavemente,
Move cose di lei meco sovente
Che l'intelletto sovr' esse disvia:
Lo suo parlar sì dolcemente suona,
Che l'anima che l'ode e che lo sente
Dice; oh me lassa! ch' io non son possente
Di dir quel che odo della donna mia:

. . . . . .

Perchè il nostro pensier non ha valore
Di ritrar tutto ciò che dice amore.

One of his sonnets begins with these four exquisite lines,— to which nothing equal can be found in Petrarca in his happiest moments:—

Ne gli occhi porta la mia donna amore
Perche sì fa gentil cio ch'ella mira:
Ognun che passa presso lei, sospira;—
E a chi saluta fa tremar lo core!

Unwearied reading, and a profound knowledge of the Italian language, and of the rise and progress of Italian civilisation, are the essential requisites for illustrating the age, the genius, and the works of Dante. It requires active and persevering industry to ransack libraries, and peruse manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not even yet brought to light. We would further recommend, that the age of Dante should be accurately distinguished from that of Boccaccio and Petrarca. This distinction has never been observed in the literary history of Italy; and the consequence has been, that notions the most different have been confounded with each other. It was about the decline of Dante's life that the political constitution of the Italian republics underwent a total and almost universal change, in consequence of which a new character was suddenly assumed by men, manners, literature, and the church.

It may be observed, that Dante, notwithstanding the number of his biographers, has not yet had a historian. Among the pieces relating to this poet, either unpublished or but little known, which we have had occasion to see, is an interesting letter, which we shall subjoin with the same orthography in which it may be read in the Laurentine library at Florence.*

About the year 1316, the friends of Dante succeeded in obtaining his restoration to his country and his possessions, on condition that he should pay a certain sum of money, and, entering church, there avow himself

* Those who wish see to the original, may find it in that library, by the following references. *Pluteum* 29., *Codex* 8., page 123.

guilty, and ask pardon of the Republic. The following was his answer on the occasion, to one of his kinsmen, whom he calls "Father," because, perhaps, he was an ecclesiastic; or, more probably, because he was older than the poet:—"From your letter, which I received with due respect and affection, I observe how much you have at heart my restoration to my country. I am bound to you the more gratefully, that an exile rarely finds a friend. But, after mature consideration, I must, by my answer, disappoint the wishes of some little minds; and I confide in the judgment to which your impartiality and prudence will lead you. Your nephew and mine has written to me, what indeed had been mentioned by many other friends, that, by a decree concerning the exiles, I am allowed to return to Florence, provided I pay a certain sum of money, and submit to the humiliation of asking and receiving absolution; wherein, my Father, I see two propositions that are ridiculous and impertinent. I speak of the impertinence of those who mention such conditions to me; for, in your letter, dictated by judgment and discretion, there is no such thing. Is such an invitation to return to his country glorious for Dante, after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? Is it thus, then, they would recompense innocence which all the world knows, and the labour and fatigue of unremitting study? Far from the man who is familiar with philosophy, be the senseless baseness of a heart of earth, that could do like a little sciolist, and imitate the infamy of some others, by offering himself up as it were in chains. Far from the man who cries aloud for justice, this compromise, by his money, with his persecutors. No, my Father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country. But I shall return with hasty steps, if you or any other can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante; but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then Florence I shall never enter. What! shall I not every where enjoy the sight of the sun and stars? and may I not seek and contemplate in every corner of the earth under the canopy of heaven consoling and delightful truth, without first rendering myself inglorious, nay infamous, to the people and republic of Florence? Bread, I hope, will not fail me." *

* In licteris vestris et reverentia debita et affectione receptis, quam repatriatio mea cure sit vobis ex animo. grata mente, ac diligenti animaversione concepi, etenim tanto me districtius obligastis, quanto rarius exules invenire amicos contingit. ad illam vero significata respondeo: et si non eatenus qualiter forsam pusillanimitas appeteret aliquorum, ut sub examine vestri consilii ante Judicium, affectuose deposco. ecce igitur quod per licteras vestri mei: que nepotis, necnon aliorum quamplurium amicorum significatum est mihi. per ordinamentum nuper factum Florentie super absolutione bannitorum. quod si solvere vellem certam pecunie quantitatem, vellemque pati notam oblationis et absolvi possem et redire at presens. in quo quidem duo ridenda et male perconciliata sunt. Pater, dico male perconciliata per illos qui tali expresserunt: nam vestre litere discretius et consultius clausulate nicil de talibus continebant. estne ista revocatio gloriosa qua d. all. (*i. e.* DANTES ALLIGHERIUS) revocatur ad patriam per trilustrium fere perpessus exilium? hecne meruit conscientia manifesta quibuslibet? hec sudor et labor continuatus in studiis? absit a viro philosophie domestico temeraria terreni cordis humilitas, ut more cujusdam cioli et aliorum infamiam quasi vinctus ipse se patiatur offerri. absit a viro predicante Justitiam, ut perpessus injuriam inferentibus velud benemerentibus, pecuniam suam solvat. non est hec via redeundi ad patriam, Pater mi, sed si alia per vos, aut deinde per alios invenietur que fame d. (*Dantis*) que onori non deroget, illam non lentis passibus acceptabo. quod si per nullam talem Florentia introitur, nunquam Florentiam introibo. quid ni? nonne solis astrorumque specula ubique conspiciam? nonne dulcissimas veritates potero speculari ubique sub celo, ni prius inglorium, imo ignominiosum populo, Florentineque civitati me reddam? quippe panis non deficiet.

Yet bread often did fail him. Every reader of his works must know by heart the prediction addressed to him by the shade of his ancestor in Paradise. (Parad. Cant. 17.) "Thou shalt prove how salt is the taste of the bread of others, and how hard the road is going up and down the stairs of others." But there is another passage in which, with designed obscurity, and a strength of expression and feeling which makes the reader tremble, he discovers an exact portrait of himself in a man who, *stripping his visage of all shame, and trembling in his very vitals, places himself in the public way, and stretches out his hand for charity.** It was by such sacrifices he preserved his principles, and sustained the magnanimity of his character. †

CHAUCER AND SPENSER. ‡

THOUGH Spenser was much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding poets were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. — Farther, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is a richness and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough; in Spenser, we wander in another world among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills, and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the deluding promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment, — and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction seem poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem always more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid, the god of love "claps on high his coloured winges *twain*;" and it is said of Gluttony in the procession of the Passions, —

"In green vine-leaves he was right fitly clad."

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond-tree. The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and his delineations are guided by no principle but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence, or the still solitude of a hermit's cell — in the extremes of sensuality or refinement. With all this, he neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegory. But he has been falsely charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is the dramatic; but he has

* See Purgat. canto 11., towards the end.

† This article, and an Essay on the Commentators on Dante, published in No. lviii. of the Edinburgh Review, were written by the late Ugo Foscolo. See his life in the Annual Obituary for 1828.

‡ Sismondi's Literature of the South.—Vol. xxiv. p. 58. June, 1815.

all the pathos of sentiment and romance, — all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not coarse and palpable, — but it assumes the character of vastness and sublimity, seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with all the appalling associations of paternatural agency. We will only refer to the Cave of Mammon, and to the description of Celleno in the Cave of Despair. The three first books of the Faery Queen are very superior to the other. It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus. There is only one book of this allegorical kind which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination); and that is the Pilgrim's Progress. It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite than Spenser and Chaucer. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; — Chaucer in severe activity of mind. Spenser was, perhaps, the most visionary of all the poets; — Chaucer the most a man of observation and of the world. He appealed directly to the bosoms and business of men. He dealt only in realities; and, relying throughout on facts or common tradition, could always produce his vouchers in nature. His sentiment is not the voluntary indulgence of the poet's fancy, but is founded on the habitual prejudices and passions of the very characters he introduces. His poetry, therefore, is essentially picturesque and dramatic: in this he chiefly differs from Boccaccio, whose power was that of sentiment. The picturesque and the dramatic in Chaucer are in a great measure the same thing; for he only describes external objects as connected with character, — as the symbols of internal passion. The costume and dress of the Canterbury pilgrims, — of the knight, — the squire, — the gat-toothed wife of Bath, speak for themselves. Again, the description of the equipage and accoutrements of the two Kings of Thrace and Inde, in the Knight's Tale, are as striking and grand as the others are lively and natural. His descriptions of natural scenery are in the same style of excellence; — their beauty consists in their truth and characteristic propriety. They have a local freshness about them, which renders them almost tangible; which gives the very feeling of the air, the coldness or moisture of the ground. In other words, he describes inanimate objects from the effect which they have on the mind of the spectator, and as they have a reference to the interest of the story. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is in the beginning of the Flower and the Leaf, where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening in the morning of the year to the singing of the nightingale, while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats, and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, — its retirement, — the early time of the day, — the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, — the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling, which make the whole seem like the recollection of an actual scene. Whoever compares this beautiful and simple passage with Rousseau's description of the Elysée in the New Heloïse ,will be able to see the difference between good writing and fine writing, or between the actual appearances of nature and the progress of the feelings they excite in us, and a parcel of words, images, and sentiments thrown together without meaning or coherence. We do not say this from any feeling of disrespect to Rousseau, for whom we have a great affection; but his imagination was not that of the poet or the painter. Severity and boldness are the characteristics of the natural style:

the artificial is equally servile and ostentatious. Nature, after all, is the soul of art; — and there is a strength in the imagination which reposes immediately on nature, which nothing else can supply. It was this trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda, — the faith of Constance, — and the heroic perseverance of the little child, who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

"Oh, *Alma redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,"

and who, after his death, still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment than any other writer, except Boccaccio, to whom Chaucer owed much, though he did not owe all to him: for he writes just as well where he did not borrow from that quarter, as where he did; as in the characters of the Pilgrims, — the Wife of Bath's Prologue, — the Squire's Tale, and in innumerable others. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it, connected with the manners of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom!

In looking back to the *chefs-d'œuvre* of former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has been made since in poetry and the arts of imitation in general. But this, perhaps, is a foolish wonder. Nothing is more contrary to fact than the supposition, that in what we understand by the fine arts, as painting and poetry, relative perfection is the result of repeated success; and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is indeed progressive, and admits of gradual improvement; but that which is not mechanical or definite, but depends on taste, genius, and feeling, very soon becomes stationary or retrograde, after a certain period, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is indeed a common error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite different, without thinking of the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i. e.* in things depending on enquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude, that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: Science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth and manhood, and seem to have in them no principle of limitation or decay; and, enquiring no farther, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the first birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was in other respects rude and barbarous. Those arts which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power have almost always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, — from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have, in general, declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of

science and of art; — of the one, never to arrive at the summit of perfection at all; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto, (Milton alone was of a later period, and not the worse for it,) — Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio — all lived near the beginning of their arts — perfected, and all but created them. These giant sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth; but they tower above their fellows: and the long line of their successors does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature, they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty, they have never been surpassed. In after-ages and more refined periods (as they are called), great men have arisen one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though, in general, the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order; as Tasso and Pope among poets, Guido and Poussin among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, when the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language acquired, they rose by clusters and in constellations — never so to rise again.

The arts of poetry and painting are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense without us — with what we know and see and feel intimately. They flow from the living shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of Nature: but the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high — the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood, three thousand or three hundred years ago, as they are at present. The face of nature, and "the human face divine," shone as bright then, as they have ever done since. But it is their light, reflected by true genius on art, which marks out the path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet, like that which

——"circled Una's angel face,
And made a sunshine in the shady place."

ARIOSTO AND TASSO.*

Ariosto's excellence is infinite grace and gaiety. He has fine animal spirits, an heroic disposition, sensibility mixed with vivacity, an eye for nature, great rapidity of narration and facility of style, and, above all, a genius buoyant, and with wings like the Griffin-horse of Rogero, which he turns and winds at pleasure. He never labours under his subject; never pauses; but is always setting out on fresh exploits. Indeed, his excessive desire not to overdo any thing, has led him to resort to the unnecessary expedient of constantly breaking off in the middle of his story, and going on to something else. His work is in this respect worse than Tristram Shandy; for there the progress of the narrative is interrupted by some incident, in a dramatic or humorous shape; but here the whole fault lies with the author. The Orlando Furioso is a tissue of these separate stories, crossing and jostling one another, and is therefore very inferior, in the general construction of the plot, to the Jerusalem Delivered. But the incidents in Ariosto are more lively, the characters more real, the

* Sismondi's Literature of the South.—Vol. xxiv. p. 55. June, 1815.

language purer, the colouring more natural: even the sentiments show at least as much feeling, with less appearance of affectation. There is less effort, less display, a less imposing use made of the common ornaments of style and artifices of composition. Tasso was the more accomplished writer, Ariosto the greater genius. There is nothing in Tasso which is not to be found, in the same or a higher degree, in others: Ariosto's merits were his own. The perusal of the one leaves a peculiar and very high relish behind it; there is a vapidness in the other, which palls at the time, and goes off sooner afterwards. Tasso indeed sets before us a dessert of melons, mingled with roses:—but it is not the first time of its being served up:—the flowers are rather faded, and the fruit has lost its freshness. Ariosto writes on as it happens, from the interest of his subject, or the impulse of his own mind. He is intent only on the adventure he has in hand,—the circumstances which might be supposed to attend it, the feelings which would naturally arise out of it. He attaches himself to his characters for their own sakes; and relates their achievements for the mere pleasure he has in telling them. This method is certainly liable to great disadvantages; but we on the whole prefer it to the obtrusive artifices of style shown in the Jerusalem,—where the author seems never to introduce any character but as a foil to some other,—makes one situation a contrast to the preceding, and his whole poem a continued antithesis in style, action, sentiment, and imagery. A fierce is opposed to a tender, a blasphemous to a pious character. A lover kills his mistress in disguise, and a husband and wife are represented defending their lives, by a pretty ambiguity of situation and sentiment, warding off the blows which are aimed, not at their own breasts, but at each other's. The same love of violent effect sometimes produces grossness of character, as in Armida, who is tricked out with all the ostentatious trappings of a prostitute. Tasso has more of what is usually called poetry than Ariosto —that is, more tropes and ornaments, and a more splendid and elaborate diction. The latter is deficient in all these:—the figures and comparisons he introduces do not elevate or adorn that which they are brought to illustrate: they are, for the most part, mere parallel cases; and his direct description, simple and striking as it uniformly is, seems to us of a far higher order of merit than the ingenious allusions of his rival. We cannot, however, agree with M. Sismondi, that there is a want of sentiment in Ariosto, or that he excels only as a painter of objects, or a narrator of events. The instance which he gives from the story of Isabella, is an exception to his general power. The episodes of Herminia, and of Tancred and Clorinda, in Tasso, are exquisitely beautiful; but they do not come up, in romantic interest or real passion, to the loves of Angelica and Medoro. We might instance, to the same purpose, the character of Bradamante;—the spirited apostrophe to knighthood, "Oh ancient knights of true and noble heart;"—that to Orlando, Sacripant, and the other lovers of Angelica—or the triumph of Medoro;—the whole progress of Orlando's passion, and the still more impressive description of his sudden recovery from his fatal infatuation, after the restoration of his senses. Perhaps the finest thing in Tasso is the famous description of Carthage, as the warriors pass by it in the enchanted bark. "Giace l' alta Cartago," &c. This passage, however, belongs properly to the class of lofty philosophical eloquence; it owes its impressiveness to the grandeur of the general ideas, and not to the force of individual feeling or immediate passion. The speech of Satan to his companions is said to have suggested the tone of Milton's character of the Devil. But we see nothing

in common in the fiend of the two poets. Tasso describes his as a mere deformed monster. Milton was the first poet who had the magnanimity to paint the devil without horns and a tail; to give him personal beauty and intellectual grandeur, with only moral deformity.

DRYDEN.*

The public voice has assigned to Dryden the first place in the second rank of our poets,—no mean station in a table of intellectual precedency so rich in illustrious names. It is allowed that, even of the few who were his superiors in genius, none has exercised a more extensive or permanent influence on the national habits of thought and expression. His life was commensurate with the period during which a great revolution in the public taste was effected; and in that revolution he played the part of Cromwell. By unscrupulously taking the lead in its wildest excesses, he obtained the absolute guidance of it. By trampling on laws, he acquired the authority of a legislator. By signalising himself as the most daring and irreverent of rebels, he raised himself to the dignity of a recognised prince. He commenced his career by the most frantic outrages. He terminated it in the repose of established sovereignty, — the author of a new code, the root of a new dynasty.

Amidst the crowd of authors who, during the earlier years of Charles the Second, courted notoriety by every species of absurdity and affectation, he speedily became conspicuous. No man exercised so much influence on the age. The reason is obvious. On no man did the age exercise so much influence. He was, perhaps, the greatest of those whom we have designated as the critical poets; and his literary career exhibited, on a reduced scale, the whole history of the school to which he belonged, — the rudeness and extravagance of its infancy, — the propriety, — the grace, — the dignified good sense, — the temperate splendour of its maturity. His imagination was torpid, till it was awakened by his judgment. He began with quaint parallels, and empty mouthing. He gradually acquired the energy of the satirist, the gravity of the moralist, the rapture of the lyric poet. The revolution through which English literature has been passing, from the time of Cowley to that of Scott, may be seen in miniature within the compass of his volumes.

His life divides itself into two parts. There is some debatable ground on the common frontier; but the line may be drawn with tolerable accuracy. The year 1678 is that on which we should be inclined to fix as the date of a great change in his manner. During the preceding period appeared some of his courtly panegyrics, — his Annus Mirabilis, and most of his plays; indeed, all his rhyming tragedies. To the subsequent period belong his best dramas, — All for Love, The Spanish Friar, and Sebastian, — his satires, his translations, his didactic poems, his fables, and his odes.

Of the small pieces which were presented to chancellors and princes, it would scarcely be fair to speak. The greatest advantage which the Fine Arts derive from the extension of knowledge is, that the patronage

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* The Poetical Works of John Dryden.—Vol. xlvii. p. 21. January, 1828.

of individuals becomes unnecessary, Some writers still affect to regret the age of patronage. None but bad writers have reason to regret it. It is always an age of general ignorance. Where ten thousand readers are eager for the appearance of a book, a small contribution from each makes up a splendid remuneration for the author. Where literature is a luxury, confined to few, each of them must pay high. If the Empress Catherine, for example, wanted an epic poem, she must have wholly supported the poet; — just as, in a remote country village, a man who wants a mutton-chop is sometimes forced to take the whole sheep; — a thing which never happens where the demand is large. But men who pay largely for the gratification of their taste, will expect to have it united with some gratification to their vanity. Flattery is carried to a shameless extent; and the habit of flattery almost inevitably introduces a false taste into composition. Its language is made up of hyperbolical common-places, — offensive from their triteness, — still more offensive from their extravagance. In no school is the trick of overstepping the modesty of nature so speedily acquired. The writer, accustomed to find exaggeration acceptable and necessary on one subject, uses it on all. It is not strange, therefore, that the early panegyrical verses of Dryden should be made up of meanness and bombast. They abound with the conceits which his immediate predecessors had brought into fashion. But his language and his versification were already far superior to theirs.

The Annus Mirabilis shows great command of expression, and a fine ear for heroic rhyme. Here its merits end. Not only has it no claim to be called poetry, but it seems to be the work of a man who could never, by any possibility, write poetry. Its affected similes are the best part of it. Gaudy weeds present a more encouraging spectacle than utter barrenness. There is scarcely a single stanza in this long work to which the imagination seems to have contributed any thing. It is produced, not by creation, but by construction. It is made up, not of pictures, but of inferences. We will give a single instance, and certainly a favourable instance, — a quatrain which Johnson has praised. Dryden is describing the sea-fight with the Dutch: —

> " Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball;
> And now their odours arm'd against them fly.
> Some preciously by shatter'd porcelain fall,
> And some by aromatic splinters die."

The poet should place his readers, as nearly as possible, in the situation of the sufferers or the spectators. His narration ought to produce feelings similar to those which would be excited by the event itself. Is this the case here? Who, in a sea-fight, ever thought of the price of the china which beats out the brains of a sailor; or of the odour of the splinter which shatters his leg? It is not by an act of the imagination, at once calling up the scene before the interior eye, but by painful meditation, — by turning the subject round and round, — by tracing out facts into remote consequences, that these incongruous topics are introduced into the description. Homer, it is true, perpetually uses epithets which are not peculiarly appropriate. Achilles is the swift-footed, when he is sitting still. Ulysses is the much-enduring, when he has nothing to endure. Every spear casts a long shadow; every ox has crooked horns; and every woman a high bosom, though these particulars may be quite beside the purpose. In our old ballads a similar practice prevails. The gold is always red, and the ladies always gay, though nothing whatever may depend on the hue of the gold, or the temper of the ladies. But

these adjectives are mere customary additions. They merge in the substantives to which they are attached. If they at all colour the idea, it is with a tinge so slight as in no respect to alter the general effect. In the passage which we have quoted from Dryden the case is very different. *Preciously* and *aromatic* divert our whole attention to themselves, and dissolve the image of the battle in a moment. The whole poem reminds us of Lucan, and of the worst parts of Lucan,—the sea-fight in the Bay of Marseilles, for example. The description of the two fleets during the night is perhaps the only passage which ought to be exempted from this censure. If it was from the Annus Mirabilis that Milton formed his opinion, when he pronounced Dryden a good rhymer, but no poet, he certainly judged correctly. But Dryden was, as we have said, one of those writers in whom the period of imagination does not precede, but follow, the period of observation and reflection.

His plays, his rhyming plays in particular, are admirable subjects for those who wish to study the morbid anatomy of the drama. He was utterly destitute of the power of exhibiting real human beings. Even in the far inferior talent, of composing characters out of those elements into which the imperfect process of our reason can resolve them, he was very deficient. His men are not even good personifications; they are not well-assorted assemblages of qualities. Now and then, indeed, he seizes a very coarse and marked distinction; and gives us, not a likeness, but a strong caricature, in which a single peculiarity is protruded, and every thing else neglected; like the Marquess of Granby at an inn door, whom we know by nothing but his baldness; or Wilkes, who is Wilkes only in his squint. These are the best specimens of his skill. For most of his pictures seem, like Turkey carpets, to have been expressly designed not to resemble any thing in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth.

The latter manner he practises most frequently in his tragedies, the former in his comedies. The comic characters are without mixture, loathsome and despicable. The men of Etherege and Vanbrugh are bad enough. Those of Smollett are perhaps worse. But they do not approach to the Celadons, the Wildbloods, the Woodalls, and the Rhodophils of Dryden. The vices of these last are set off by a certain fierce hard impudence, to which we know nothing comparable. Their love is the appetite of beasts; their friendship the confederacy of knaves. The ladies seem to have been expressly created to form helps meet for such gentlemen. In deceiving and insulting their old fathers, they do not perhaps exceed the licence which, by immemorial prescription, has been allowed to heroines. But they also cheat at cards, rob strong-boxes, put up their favours to auction, betray their friends, abuse their rivals in the style of Billingsgate, and invite their lovers in the language of the Piazza. These, it must be remembered, are not the valets and waiting-women, the Mascarilles and Nerines, but the recognised heroes and heroines, who appear as the representatives of good society, and who, at the end of the fifth act, marry and live very happily ever after. The sensuality, baseness, and malice of their natures, is unredeemed by any quality of a different description,—by any touch of kindness,—or even by any honest burst of hearty hatred and revenge. We are in a world where there is no humanity, no veracity, no sense of shame,—a world for which any good-natured man would gladly take in exchange the society of Milton's devils. But as soon as we enter the regions of Tragedy, we find a great change. There is no lack of fine sentiment there. Metastasio is surpassed

in his own department. Scuderi is out-scuderied. We are introduced to people whose proceedings we can trace to no motive, — of whose feelings we can form no more idea than of a sixth sense. We have left a race of creatures, whose love is as delicate and affectionate as the passion which an alderman feels for a turtle. We find ourselves among beings, whose love is a purely disinterested emotion, — a loyalty extending to passive obedience, — a religion, like that of the Quietists, unsupported by any sanction of hope or fear. We see nothing but despotism without power, and sacrifices without compensation.

We will give a few instances: — In Aurengzebe, Arimant, governor of Agra, falls in love with his prisoner Indamora. She rejects his suit with scorn; but assures him that she shall make great use of her power over him. He threatens to be angry. — She answers, very coolly: —

> "Do not: your anger, like your love, is vain:
> Whene'er I please, you must be pleased again.
> Knowing what power I have your will to bend,
> I'll use it; for I need just such a friend."

This is no idle menace. She soon brings a letter, addressed to his rival, — orders him to read it, — asks him whether he thinks it sufficiently tender, — and finally commands him to carry it himself. Such tyranny as this, it may be thought, would justify resistance. Arimant does indeed venture to remonstrate: —

> "This fatal paper rather let me tear,
> Than, like Bellerophon, my sentence bear."

The answer of the the lady is incomparable: —

> "You may; but 'twill not be your best advice;
> 'Twill only give me pains of writing twice.
> You know you must obey me, soon or late.
> Why should you vainly struggle with your fate?"

Poor Arimant seems to be of the same opinion. He mutters something about fate and free-will, and walks off with the billet-doux.

In the Indian Emperor, Montezuma presents Almeria with a garland as a token of his love, and offers to make her his queen. She replies: —

> "I take this garland, not as given by you;
> But as my merit's and my beauty's due;
> As for the crown which you, my slave, possess,
> To share it with you would but make me less."

In return for such proofs of tenderness as these, her admirer consents to murder his two sons, and a benefactor, to whom he feels the warmest gratitude. Lyndaraxa, in the Conquest of Granada, assumes the same lofty tone with Abdelmelech. He complains that she smiles upon his rival.

> "*Lynd.* And when did I my power so far resign,
> That you should regulate each look of mine?
> *Abdel.* Then, when you gave your love, you gave that power.
> *Lynd.* 'Twas during pleasure — 'tis revoked this hour.
> *Abdel.* I'll hate you, and this visit is my last.
> *Lynd.* Do, if you can; you know I hold you fast."

That these passages violate all historical propriety; that sentiments, to which nothing similar was ever even affected except by the cavaliers of Europe, are transferred to Mexico and Agra, is a light accusation. We have no objection to a conventional world, an Illyrian puritan, or a Bohemian seaport. While the faces are good, we care little about the

back-ground. Sir Joshua Reynolds says, that the curtains and hangings in a historical painting ought to be, not velvet or cotton, but merely drapery. The same principle should be applied to poetry and romance. The truth of character is the first object; the truth of place and time is to be considered only in the second place. Puff himself could tell the actor to turn out his toes, and remind him that Keeper Hatton was a great dancer. We wish that, in our own time, a writer of a very different order from Puff had not too often forgotten human nature in the niceties of upholstery, millinery, and cookery.

We blame Dryden, not because the persons of his dramas are not Moors or Americans, but because they are not men and women; — not because love, such as he represents it, could not exist in a harem or in a wigwam; but because it could not exist anywhere. As is the love of his heroes, such are all their other emotions. All their qualities, their courage, their generosity, their pride, are on the same colossal scale. Justice and prudence are virtues which can exist only in a moderate degree, and which change their nature and their name if pushed to excess. Of justice and prudence, therefore, Dryden leaves his favourites destitute. He did not care to give them what he could not give without measure. The tyrants and ruffians are merely the heroes altered by a few touches, similar to those which transformed the honest face of Roger de Coverley into the Saracen's head. Through the grin and frown, the original features are still perceptible.

It is in the tragi-comedies that these absurdities strike us most. The two races of men, or rather the angels and the baboons, are there presented to us together. We meet in one scene with nothing but gross, selfish, unblushing, lying libertines of both sexes, who, as a punishment we suppose, for their depravity, are condemned to talk nothing but prose. But as soon as we meet with people who speak in verse, we know that we are in society which would have enraptured the Cathos and Madelon of Molière, in society for which Oroondates would have too little of the lover, and Clelia too much of the coquette.

As Dryden was unable to render his plays interesting by means of that which is the peculiar and appropriate excellence of the drama, it was necessary that he should find some substitute for it. In his comedies he supplied its place, sometimes by wit, but more frequently by intrigue, by disguises, mistakes of persons, dialogues at cross purposes, hair-breadth escapes, perplexing concealments, and surprising disclosures. He thus succeeded at least in making these pieces very amusing.

In his tragedies he trusted, and not altogether without reason, to his diction and his versification. It was on this account, in all probability, that he so eagerly adopted, and so reluctantly abandoned, the practice of rhyming in his plays. What is unnatural appears less unnatural in that species of verse, than in lines which approach more nearly to common conversation; and in the management of the heroic couplet, Dryden has never been equalled. It is unnecessary to urge any arguments against a fashion now universally condemned. But it is worthy of observation, that though Dryden was deficient in that talent which blank verse exhibits to the greatest advantage, and was certainly the best writer of heroic rhyme in our language, yet the plays which have, from the time of their first appearance, been considered as his best, are in blank verse. No experiment can be more decisive.

It must be allowed that the worst even of the rhyming tragedies contains good description and magnificent rhetoric. But even when we

forget that they are plays, and, passing by their dramatic improprieties, consider them with reference to the language, we are perpetually disgusted by passages which it is difficult to conceive how any author could have written, or any audience have tolerated, rants in which the raving violence of the manner forms a strange contrast with the abject tameness of the thought. The author laid the whole fault on the audience, and declared, that when he wrote them, he considered them bad enough to please. This defence is unworthy of a man of genius, and, after all, is no defence. Otway pleased without rant; and so might Dryden have done, if he had possessed the powers of Otway. The fact is, that he had a tendency to bombast, which, though subsequently corrected by time and thought, was never wholly removed, and which showed itself in performances not designed to please the rude mob of the theatre.

Some indulgent critics have represented this failing as an indication of genius, as the profusion of unlimited wealth, the wantonness of exuberant vigour. To us it seems to bear a nearer affinity to the tawdriness of poverty, or the spasms and convulsions of weakness. Dryden surely had not more imagination than Homer, Dante, or Milton, who never fall into this vice. The swelling diction of Æschylus and Isaiah resembles that of Almanzor and Maximin no more than the tumidity of a muscle resembles the tumidity of a boil. The former is symptomatic of health and strength, the latter of debility and disease. If ever Shakspeare rants, it is not when his imagination is hurrying him along, but when he is hurrying his imagination along, — when his mind is for a moment jaded, — when, as was said of Euripides, he resembles a lion, who excites his own fury by lashing himself with his tail. What happened to Shakspeare from the occasional suspension of his powers, happened to Dryden from constant impotence. He, like his confederate Lee, had judgment enough to appreciate the great poets of the preceding age, but not judgment enough to shun competition with them. He felt and admired their wild and daring sublimity. That it belonged to another age than that in which he lived, and required other talents than those which he possessed; that, in aspiring to emulate it, he was wasting, in a hopeless attempt, powers which might render him preeminent in a different career, was a lesson which he did not learn till late. As those knavish enthusiasts, the French prophets, courted inspiration, by mimicking the writhings, swoonings, and gaspings, which they considered as its symptoms, he attempted, by affected fits of poetical fury, to bring on a real paroxysm; and, like them, he got nothing but his distortions for his pains.

Horace very happily compares those who, in his time, imitated Pindar, to the youth who attempted to fly to heaven on waxen wings, and who experienced so fatal and ignominious a fall. His own admirable good sense preserved him from this error, and taught him to cultivate a style in which excellence was within his reach. Dryden had not the same self-knowledge. He saw that the greatest poets were never so successful as when they rushed beyond the ordinary bounds, and that some inexplicable good fortune preserved them from tripping even when they staggered on the brink of nonsense. He did not perceive that they were guided and sustained by a power denied to himself. They wrote from the dictation of the imagination, and they found a response in the imaginations of others. He, on the contrary, sat down to work himself, by reflection and argument, into a deliberate wildness, a rational frenzy.

In looking over the admirable designs which accompany the Faust, we have always been much struck by one which represents the wizard and

the tempter riding at full speed. The demon sits on his furious horse as heedlessly as if he were reposing on a chair. That he should keep his saddle in such a posture, would seem impossible to any who did not know that he was secure in the privileges of a superhuman nature. The attitude of Faust, on the contrary, is the perfection of horsemanship. Poets of the first order might safely write as desperately as Mephistophiles rode. But Dryden, though admitted to communion with higher spirits, though armed with a portion of their power, and intrusted with some of their secrets, was of another race. What they might securely venture to do, it was madness in him to attempt. It was necessary that taste and critical science should supply his deficiencies.

We will give a few examples. Nothing can be finer than the description of Hector at the Grecian wall: —

ὁ δ' ἄρ' ἔσθορε φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ,
Νυκτὶ θοῇ ἀτάλαντος ὑπώπια· λάμπε δὲ χαλκῷ
Σμερδαλέῳ, τὸν ἕεστο περὶ χροΐ· δοιὰ δὲ χερσὶ
Δοῦρ' ἔχεν· οὐκ ἄν τις μιν ἐρυκάκοι ἀντιβολήσας,
Νόσφι θεῶν, ὅτ' ἐπᾶλτο πύλας· πυρὶ δ' ὅσσε δεδήει· —
Αὐτίκα δ' οἱ μὲν τεῖχος ὑπέρβασαν, οἱ δὲ κατ' αὐτὰς
Ποιητὰς ἐσέχυντο πύλας· Δαναοὶ δ' ἐφόβηθεν
Νῆας ἀνὰ γλαφυράς· ὅμαδος δ' ἀλίαστος ἐτύχθη.

What daring expressions! Yet how significant! How picturesque! Hector seems to rise up in his strength and fury. The gloom of night in his frown, — the fire burning in his eyes, — the javelins and the blazing armour, — the mighty rush through the gates and down the battlements, — the trampling and the infinite roar of the multitude, every thing is with us; — every thing is real.

Dryden has described a very similar event in Maximin; and has done his best to be sublime, as follows: —

> "There with a forest of their darts he strove,
> And stood like Capaneus defying Jove;
> With his broad sword the boldest beating down,
> Till Fate grew pale, lest he should win the town,
> And turn'd the iron leaves of its dark book
> To make new dooms, or mend what it mistook."

How exquisite is the imagery of the fairy-songs in the Tempest and the Midsummer Night's Dream; Ariel riding through the twilight on the bat, or sucking in the bells of flowers with the bee; or the little bower-women of Titania, driving the spiders from the couch of the queen! Dryden truly said, that

> "Shakspeare's magic could not copied be;
> Within that circle none durst walk but he."

It would have been well if he had not himself dared to step within the enchanted line, and drawn on himself a fate similar to that which, according to the old superstition, punished such presumptuous interference. The following lines are parts of the song of his fairies: —

> "Merry, merry, merry, we sail from the East,
> Half-tippled at a rainbow feast.
> In the bright moonshine, while winds whistle loud,
> Tivy, tivy, tivy, we mount and we fly.
> All racking along in a downy white cloud;
> And lest our leap from the sky prove too far,
> We slide on the back of a new-falling star,
> And drop from above
> In a jelly of love."

These are very favourable instances. Those who wish for a bad one may read the dying speeches of Maximin, and may compare them with the last scenes of Othello and Lear.

If Dryden had died before the expiration of the first of the periods into which we have divided his literary life, he would have left a reputation, at best, little higher than that of Lee or Davenant. He would have been known only to men of letters; and by them he would have been mentioned as a writer who threw away, on subjects which he was incompetent to treat, powers which, judiciously employed, might have raised him to eminence; whose diction and whose numbers had sometimes very high merit, but all whose works were blemished by a false taste, and by errors of gross negligence. A few of his prologues and epilogues might perhaps still have been remembered and quoted. In these little pieces, he early showed all the powers which afterwards rendered him the greatest of modern satirists. But during the latter part of his life, he gradually abandoned the drama. His plays appeared at longer intervals. He renounced rhyme in tragedy. His language became less turgid — his characters less exaggerated. He did not indeed produce correct representations of human nature; but he ceased to daub such monstrous chimeras as those which abound in his earlier pieces. Here and there passages occur worthy of the best ages of the British stage. The style which the drama requires, changes with every change of character and situation. He who can vary his manner to suit the variation, is the great dramatist; but he who excels in one manner only will, when that manner happens to be appropriate, appear to be a great dramatist; as the hands of a watch, which does not go, point right once in the twelve hours. Sometimes there is a scene of solemn debate. This a mere rhetorician may write as well as the greatest tragedian that ever lived. We confess that to us the speech of Sempronius in Cato seems very nearly as good as Shakspeare could have made it. But when the senate breaks up, and we find that the lovers and their mistresses, the hero, the villain, and the deputy-villain, all continue to harangue in the same style, we perceive the difference between a man who can write a play and a man who can write a speech. In the same manner, wit, a talent for description, or a talent for narration, may, for a time, pass for dramatic genius. Dryden was an incomparable reasoner in verse. He was conscious of his power; he was proud of it; and the authors of the Rehearsal justly charged him with abusing it. His warriors and princesses are fond of discussing points of amorous casuistry, such as would have delighted a Parliament of Love. They frequently go still deeper, and speculate on philosophical necessity and the origin of evil.

There were, however, some occasions which absolutely required this peculiar talent. Then Dryden was indeed at home. All his best scenes are of this description. They are all between men; for the heroes of Dryden, like many other gentlemen, can never talk sense when ladies are in company. They are all intended to exhibit the empire of reason over violent passion. We have two interlocutors; the one eager and impassioned, the other high, cool, and judicious. The composed and rational character gradually acquires the ascendency. His fierce companion is first inflamed to rage by his reproaches, then overawed by his equanimity, convinced by his arguments, and soothed by his persuasions. This is the case in the scene between Hector and Troilus, in that between Antony and Ventidius, and in that between Sebastian and Dorax. Nothing of the same kind in Shakspeare is equal to them, except the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, which is worth them all three.

Some years before his death, Dryden altogether ceased to write for the stage. He had turned his powers in a new direction, with success the most splendid and decisive. His taste had gradually awakened his creative faculties. The first rank in poetry was beyond his reach, but he challenged and secured the most honourable place in the second. His imagination resembled the wings of an ostrich. It enabled him to run, though not to soar. When he attempted the highest flights, he became ridiculous; but while he remained in a lower region, he outstripped all competitors.

All his natural, and all his acquired powers, fitted him to found a good critical school of poetry. Indeed he carried his reforms too far for his age. After his death, our literature retrograded; and a century was necessary to bring it back to the point at which he left it. The general soundness and healthfulness of his mental constitution, his information of vast superficies, though of small volume, his wit scarcely inferior to that of the most distinguished followers of Donne, his eloquence, grave, deliberate, and commanding, could not save him from disgraceful failure as a rival of Shakspeare, but raised him far above the level of Boileau. His command of language was immense. With him died the secret of the old poetical diction of England,—the art of producing rich effects by familiar words. In the following century, it was as completely lost as the Gothic method of painting glass, and was but poorly supplied by the laborious and tesselated imitations of Mason and Gray. On the other hand, he was the first writer under whose skilful management the scientific vocabulary fell into natural and pleasing verse. In this department, he succeeded as completely as his contemporary Gibbons succeeded in the similar enterprise of carving the most delicate flowers from heart of oak. The toughest and most knotty parts of language became ductile at his touch. His versification, in the same manner, while it gave the first model of that neatness and precision which the following generation esteemed so highly, exhibited, at the same time, the last examples of nobleness, freedom, variety of pause and cadence. His tragedies in rhyme, however worthless in themselves, had at least served the purpose of nonsense-verses: they had taught him all the arts of melody which the heroic couplet admits. For bombast, his prevailing vice, his new subjects gave little opportunity; his better taste gradually discarded it.

He possessed, as we have said, in a pre-eminent degree, the power of reasoning in verse; and this power was now peculiarly useful to him. His logic is by no means uniformly sound. On points of criticism he always reasons ingeniously; and, when he is disposed to be honest, correctly. But the theological and political questions which he undertook to treat in verse were precisely those which he understood least. His arguments, therefore, are often worthless. But the manner in which they are stated is beyond all praise. The style is transparent. The topics follow each other in the happiest order. The objections are drawn up in such a manner, that the whole fire of the reply may be brought to bear on them. The circumlocutions which are substituted for technical phrases, are clear, neat, and exact. The illustrations at once adorn and elucidate the reasoning. The sparkling epigrams of Cowley, and the simple garrulity of the burlesque poets of Italy, are alternately employed, in the happiest manner, to give effect to what is obvious, or clearness to what is obscure.

His literary creed was catholic, even to latitudinarianism; not from any want of acuteness, but from a disposition to be easily satisfied. He was

quick to discern the smallest glimpse of merit; he was indulgent even to gross improprieties, when accompanied by any redeeming talent. When he said a severe thing, it was to serve a temporary purpose — to support an argument, or to tease a rival. Never was so able a critic so free from fastidiousness. He loved the old poets, especially Shakspeare. He admired the ingenuity which Donne and Cowley had so wildly abused. He did justice, amidst the general silence, to the memory of Milton. He praised to the skies the schoolboy lines of Addison. Always looking on the fair side of every object, he admired extravagance, on account of the invention which he supposed it to indicate; he excused affectation in favour of wit; he tolerated even tameness, for the sake of the correctness which was its concomitant.

It was probably to this turn of mind, rather than to the more disgraceful causes which Johnson has assigned, that we are to attribute the exaggeration which disfigures the panegyrics of Dryden. No writer, it must be owned, has carried the flattery of dedication to a greater length. But this was not, we suspect, merely interested servility; it was the overflowing of a mind singularly disposed to admiration, — of a mind which diminished vices, and magnified virtues and obligations. The most adulatory of his addresses is that in which he dedicates the State of Innocence to Mary of Modena. Johnson thinks it strange that any man should use such language, without self-detestation. But he has not remarked, that to the very same work is prefixed an eulogium on Milton, which certainly could not have been acceptable at the court of Charles the Second. Many years later, when Whig principles were in a great measure triumphant, Sprat refused to admit a monument of John Philips into Westminster Abbey — because, in the epitaph, the name of Milton incidentally occurred. The walls of his church, he declared, should not be polluted by the name of a republican! Dryden was attached, both by principle and interest, to the Court. But nothing could deaden his sensibility to excellence. We are unwilling to accuse him severely, because the same disposition, which prompted him to pay so generous a tribute to the memory of a poet whom his patrons detested, hurried him into extravagance when he described a princess, distinguished by the splendour of her beauty, and the graciousness of her manners.

This is an amiable temper; but it is not the temper of great men. Where there is elevation of character, there will be fastidiousness. It is only in novels, and on tombstones, that we meet with people who are indulgent to the faults of others, and unmerciful to their own; and Dryden, at all events, was not one of these paragons. His charity was extended most liberally to others, but it certainly began at home. In taste he was by no means deficient. His critical works are, beyond all comparison, superior to any which had, till then, appeared in England. They were generally intended as apologies for his own poems, rather than as expositions of general principles; he, therefore, often attempts to deceive the reader by sophistry which could scarcely have deceived himself. His dicta are the dicta not of a judge, but of an advocate; — often of an advocate in an unsound cause. Yet, in the very act of misrepresenting the laws of composition, he shows how well he understands them. But he was perpetually acting against his better knowledge. His sins were sins against light. He trusted, that what was bad would be pardoned for the sake of what was good. What was good he took no pains to make better. He was not, like most persons who rise to eminence, dissatisfied even with his best productions. He had set up no

unattainable standard of perfection, the contemplation of which might at once improve and mortify him. His path was not attended by an unapproachable mirage of excellence, for ever receding, and for ever pursued. He was not disgusted by the negligence of others, and he extended the same toleration to himself. His mind was of a slovenly character, — fond of splendour, but indifferent to neatness. Hence most of his writings exhibit the sluttish magnificence of a Russian noble, all vermin and diamonds, dirty linen and inestimable sables. Those faults which spring from affectation, time and thought in a great measure removed from his poems. But his carelessness he retained to the last. If towards the close of his life he less frequently went wrong from negligence, it was only because long habits of composition rendered it more easy to go right. In his best pieces, we find false rhymes, — triplets, in which the third line appears to be a mere intruder, and, while it breaks the music, adds nothing to the meaning, — gigantic Alexandrines of fourteen and sixteen syllables, and truncated verses for which he never troubled himself to find a termination or a partner.

Such are the beauties and the faults which may be found in profusion throughout the later works of Dryden. A more just and complete estimate of his natural and acquired powers, — of the merits of his style and of its blemishes, may be formed from the Hind and Panther, than from any of his other writings. As a didactic poem, it is far superior to the Religio Laici. The satirical parts, particularly the character of Burnet, are scarcely inferior to the best passages in Absalom and Achitophel. There are, moreover, occasional touches of a tenderness which affects us more, because it is decent, rational, and manly, and reminds us of the best scenes in his tragedies. His versification sinks and swells in happy unison with the subject; and his wealth of language seems to be unlimited. Yet, the carelessness with which he has constructed his plot, and the innumerable inconsistencies into which he is every moment falling, detract much from the pleasure which such various excellence affords.

In Absalom and Achitophel he hit upon a new and rich vein, which he worked with signal success. The ancient satirists were the subjects of a despotic government. They were compelled to abstain from political topics, and to confine their attention to the frailties of private life. They might, indeed, sometimes venture to take liberties with public men,

"Quorum Flaminia tegitur cinis atque Latina."

Thus Juvenal immortalised the obsequious senators, who met to decide the fate of the memorable turbot. His fourth satire frequently reminds us of the great political poem of Dryden; but it was not written till Domitian had fallen, and it wants something of the peculiar flavour, which belongs to contemporary invective alone. His anger has stood so long, that, though the body is not impaired, the effervescence, the first cream, is gone. Boileau lay under similar restraints; and if he had been free from all restraint, would have been no match for our countryman.

The advantages which Dryden derived from the nature of his subject he improved to the very utmost. His manner is almost perfect. The style of Horace and Boileau is fit only for light subjects. The Frenchman did indeed attempt to turn the theological reasonings of the Provincial Letters into verse, but with very indifferent success. The glitter of Pope is cold. The ardour of Persius is without brilliancy. Magnificent versification and ingenious combinations rarely harmonise with the

expression of deep feeling. In Juvenal and Dryden alone we have the sparkle and the heat together. Those great satirists succeeded in communicating the fervour of their feelings to materials the most incombustible, and kindled the whole mass into a blaze, at once dazzling and destructive. We cannot, indeed, think without regret of the part which so eminent a writer as Dryden took in the disputes of that period. There was, no doubt, madness and wickedness on both sides: but there was liberty on the one, and despotism on the other. On this point, however, we will not dwell. At Talavera the English and French troops for a moment suspended their conflict, to drink of a stream which flowed between them. The shells were passed across from enemy to enemy, without apprehension or molestation. We, in the same manner, would rather assist our political adversaries to drink with us of that fountain of intellectual pleasure, which should be the common refreshment of both parties, than disturb and pollute it with the havoc of unseasonable hostilities.

Mac-Flecknoe is inferior to Absalom and Achitophel, only in the subject. In the execution it is even superior. But the greatest work of Dryden was the last, the Ode on Saint Cecilia's day. It is the masterpiece of the second class of poetry, and ranks but just below the great models of the first. It reminds us of the Pedasus of Achilles —

ὅς, καὶ θνητὸς ἐὼν, ἕπετ' ἵπποις ἀθανάτοισι.

By comparing it with the impotent ravings of the heroic tragedies, we may measure the progress which the mind of Dryden had made. He had learned to avoid a too audacious competition with higher natures, to keep at a distance from the verge of bombast or nonsense, to venture on no expression which did not convey a distinct idea to his own mind. There is none of that "darkness visible" of style which he had formerly affected, and in which the greatest poets only can succeed. Everything is definite, significant, and picturesque. His early writings resembled the gigantic works of those Chinese gardeners who attempt to rival nature herself, to form cataracts of terrific height and sound, to raise precipitous ridges of mountains, and to imitate in artificial plantations, the vastness and the gloom of some primeval forest. This manner he abandoned; nor did he ever adopt the Dutch taste which Pope affected, the trim parterres, and the rectangular walks. He rather resembled our Kents and Browns, who, imitating the great features of landscape without emulating them, consulting the genius of the place, assisting nature, and carefully disguising their art, produced, not a Chamouni or a Niagara, but a Stowe or a Hagley.

We are, on the whole, inclined to regret that Dryden did not accomplish his purpose of writing an Epic poem. It certainly would not have been a work of the highest rank. It would not have rivalled the Iliad, the Odyssey, or the Paradise Lost; but it would have been superior to the productions of Apollonius, Lucan, or Statius, and not inferior to the Jerusalem Delivered. It would probably have been a vigorous narrative, animated with something of the spirit of the old romances, enriched with much splendid description, and interspersed with fine declamations and disquisitions. The danger of Dryden would have been from aiming too high; from dwelling too much, for example, on his angels of kingdoms, and attempting a competition with that great writer, who in his own time had so incomparably succeeded in representing to us the sights and sounds of another world. To Milton, and to Milton alone, belonged the

secrets of the great deep, the beach of sulphur, the ocean of fire, the palaces of the fallen dominations, glimmering through the everlasting shade, the silent wilderness of verdure and fragrance where armed angels kept watch over the sleep of the first lovers, the portico of diamond, the sea of jasper, the sapphire pavement empurpled with celestial roses, and the infinite ranks of the Cherubim, blazing with adamant and gold. The council, the tournament, the procession, the crowded cathedral, the camp, the guard-room, the chase, were the proper scenes for Dryden.

But we have not space to pass in review all the works which Dryden wrote. We, therefore, will not speculate longer on those which he might possibly have written. He may, on the whole, be pronounced to have been a man possessed of splendid talents, which he often abused, and of a sound judgment, the admonitions of which he often neglected; a man who succeeded only in an inferior department of his art, but who, in that department, succeeded pre-eminently; and who, with a more independent spirit, a more anxious desire of excellence, and more respect for himself, would, in his own walk, have attained to absolute perfection.

SWIFT.*

With the most unfavourable impressions of Swift's personal and political character†, perhaps it is not easy for us to judge quite fairly of his works. Yet we are far from being insensible to their great and very peculiar merits. Their chief peculiarity is, that they were almost all what may be called occasional productions — not written for fame or for posterity — from the fulness of the mind, or the desire of instructing mankind — but on the spur of the occasion — for promoting some temporary and immediate object, and producing a practical effect, in the attainment of which their whole importance centered. With the exception of the Tale of a Tub, Gulliver, The Polite Conversation, and about half a volume of poetry, this description will apply to almost all that is now before us; — and it is no small proof of the vigour and vivacity of his genius, that posterity should have been so anxious to preserve these careless and hasty productions, upon which their author appears to have set no other value than as means for the attainment of an end. The truth is, accordingly, that *they are* very extraordinary performances; and, considered with a view to the purposes for which they were intended, have probably never been equalled in any period of the world. They are written with great plainness, force, and intrepidity — advance at once to the matter in dispute — give battle to the strength of the enemy, and never seek any kind of advantage from darkness or obscurity. Their distinguishing feature, however, is the force and the vehemence of the invective in which they abound: — the copiousness, the steadiness, the perseverance, and the dexterity with which abuse and ridicule are showered upon the adversary. This, we think, was, beyond all doubt, Swift's great talent, and the weapon

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* Scott's Life of Swift. — Vol. xxvii. p. 44. September, 1816.

† See a sketch of Swift's political and personal character, written with unsparing severity, pages 8—44. of the article from which the above strictures on his literary merits are taken.

by which he made himself formidable. He was, without exception, the greatest and most efficient *libeller* that ever exercised the trade; and possessed, in an eminent degree, all the qualifications which it requires: — a clear head — a cold heart — a vindictive temper — no admiration of noble qualities — no sympathy with suffering — not much conscience — not much consistency — a ready wit — a sarcastic humour — a thorough knowledge of the baser parts of human nature — and a complete familiarity with every thing that is low, homely, and familiar in language. These were his gifts; — and he soon felt for what ends they were given. Almost all his works are libels; generally upon individuals, sometimes upon sects and parties, sometimes upon human nature. Whatever be his end, however, personal abuse, direct — vehement, unsparing invective, is his means. It is his sword and his shield, his panoply and his chariot of war. In all his writings, accordingly, there is nothing to raise or exalt our notions of human nature, — but every thing to vilify and degrade. We may learn from them, perhaps, to dread the consequences of base actions, but never to love the feelings that lead to generous ones. There is no spirit, indeed, of love or of honour in any part of them; but an unvaried and harassing display of insolence and animosity in the writer, and villany and folly in those of whom he is writing. Though a great polemic, he makes no use of general principles, nor ever enlarges his views to a wide or comprehensive conclusion. Every thing is particular with him, and, for the most part, strictly personal. To make amends, however, we do think him quite without a competitor in personalities. With a quick and sagacious spirit, and a bold and popular manner, he joins an exact knowledge of all the strong and the weak parts of every cause he has to manage; and, without the least restraint from delicacy, either of taste or of feeling, he seems always to think the most effectual blows the most advisable, and no advantage unlawful that is likely to be successful for the moment. Disregarding all the laws of polished hostility, he uses, at one and the same moment, his sword and his poisoned dagger — his hands and his teeth, and his envenomed breath, — and does not even scruple, upon occasion, to imitate his own yahoos, by discharging on his unhappy victims a shower of filth, from which neither courage nor dexterity can afford any protection. — Against such an antagonist, it was, of course, at no time very easy to make head; and accordingly his invective seems, for the most part, to have been as much dreaded, and as tremendous, as the personal ridicule of Voltaire. Both were inexhaustible, well directed, and unsparing; but even when Voltaire drew blood, he did not mangle the victim, and was only mischievous when Swift was brutal; any one who will compare the epigrams on M. Franc de Pompignan with those on Tighe or Bettesworth, will easily understand the distinction.

Of the few works which he wrote in the capacity of an author, and not of a party zealot or personal enemy, The Tale of a Tub was by far the earliest in point of time, and has, by many, been considered as the first in point of merit. We confess we are not of that opinion. It is by far too long and elaborate for a piece of pleasantry; — the humour sinks, in many places, into mere buffoonery and nonsense; — and there is a real and extreme tediousness arising from the too successful mimicry of tediousness and pedantry. All these defects are apparent enough even in the main story, in which the incidents are without the shadow of verisimilitude or interest, and by far too thinly scattered; but they become unsufferable in the interludes or digressions, the greater part of which

are to us utterly illegible, and seem to consist almost entirely of cold and forced conceits, and exaggerated representations of long exploded whims and absurdities. The style of this work, which appears to us greatly inferior to the history of John Bull or even of Martinus Scriblerus, is evidently more elaborate than that of Swift's other writings, — but has all its substantial characteristics. Its great merit seems to consist in the author's perfect familiarity with all sorts of common and idiomatical expressions, his unlimited command of established phrases, both solemn and familiar, and the unrivalled profusion and propriety with which he heaps them up and applies them to the exposition of the most fantastic conceptions. To deliver absurd notions or incredible tales in the most authentic, honest, and direct terms, that have been used for the communication of truth and reason, and to luxuriate in all the variations of that grave, plain, and perspicuous phraseology, which dull men use to express their homely opinions, seems to be the great art of this extraordinary humourist, and that which gives their character and their edge to his sly strokes of satire, his keen sarcasms and bitter personalities.

The voyages of Captain Lemuel Gulliver is indisputably his greatest work. The idea of making fictitious travels the vehicle of satire as well as of amusement, is at least as old as Lucian; but has never been carried into execution with such success, spirit, and originality, as in this celebrated performance. The brevity, the minuteness, the homeliness, the unbroken seriousness of the narrative, all give a character of truth and simplicity to the work, which at once palliates the extravagance of the fiction, and enhances the effect of those weighty reflections and cutting severities in which it abounds. Yet, though it is probable enough that without those touches of satire and observation the work would have appeared childish and preposterous, we are persuaded that it pleases chiefly by the novelty and vivacity of the extraordinary pictures it presents, and the entertainment we receive from following the fortunes of the traveller in his several extraordinary adventures. The greater part of the wisdom and satire at least appears to us to be extremely vulgar and commonplace; and we have no idea that they they could possibly appear either impressive or entertaining, if presented without these accompaniments. A considerable part of the pleasure we derive from the voyages of Gulliver, in short, is of the same description with that which we receive from those of Sinbad the Sailor, and is chiefly heightened, we believe, by the greater brevity and minuteness of the story, and the superior art that is employed to give it an appearance of truth and probability, in the very midst of its wonders. Among those arts, as Mr. Scott has judiciously observed, one of the most important is the exact adaptation of the narrative to the condition of its supposed author.

" The character of the imaginary traveller is exactly that of Dampier, or any other sturdy nautical wanderer of the period, endowed with courage and common sense, who sailed through distant seas, without losing a single English prejudice which he had brought from Portsmouth or Plymouth, and on his return gave a grave and simple narrative of what he had seen or heard in foreign countries. The character is perhaps strictly English, and can be hardly relished by a foreigner. The reflections and observations of Gulliver are never more refined or deeper than might be expected from a plain master of a merchantman, or surgeon in the Old Jewry; and there was such a reality given to his whole person, that one seaman is said to have sworn he knew Captain Gulliver very well, but he lived at Wapping, not at Rotherhithe. It is the contrast between the natural ease and simplicity of such a style, and the marvels which the volume contains, that forms one great charm of this memorable satire on the imperfections,

follies, and vices of mankind. The exact calculations preserved in the first and second part, have also the effect of qualifying the extravagance of the fable. It is said that in natural objects, where proportion is exactly preserved, the marvellous, whether the object be gigantic or diminutive, is lessened in the eyes of the spectator; and it is certain, in general, that proportion forms an essential attribute of truth, and consequently of verisimilitude, or that which renders a narration probable. If the reader is disposed to grant the traveller his postulates as to the existence of the strange people whom he visits, it would be difficult to detect any inconsistency in his narrative. On the contrary, it would seem that he and they conduct themselves towards each other, precisely as must necessarily have happened in the respective circumstances which the author has supposed. In this point of view, perhaps the highest praise that could have been bestowed on Gulliver's Travels was the censure of a learned Irish prelate, who said the book contained *some* things which he could not prevail upon himself to believe." Vol. i. p. 340, 341.

That the interest does not arise from the satire, but from the plausible description of physical wonders, seems to be farther proved by the fact, that the parts which please the least are those in which there is most satire and least of those wonders. In the voyage to Laputa, after the first description of the flying island, the attention is almost exclusively directed to intellectual absurdities; and every one is aware of the dulness that is the result. Even as a satire, indeed, this part is extremely poor and defective; nor can any thing show more clearly the author's incapacity for large and comprehensive views than his signal failure in all those parts which invited him to such contemplations. In the multitude of his vulgar and farcical representations of particular errors in philosophy, he nowhere appears to have any sense of its true value or principles; but satisfies himself with collecting or imagining a number of fantastical quackeries, which tend to illustrate nothing but his contempt for human understanding. Even where his subject seems to invite him to something of a higher flight, he uniformly shrinks back from it, and takes shelter in commonplace derision. What, for instance, can be poorer than the use he makes of the evocation of the illustrious dead — in which Hannibal is brought in just to say, that he had not a drop of vinegar in his camp; and Aristotle, to ask two of his commentators, "whether the rest of the tribe were as great dunces as themselves?" The voyage to the Houyhnhnms is commonly supposed to displease by its vile and degrading representations of human nature; but, if we do not strangely mistake our own feelings on the subject, the impression it produces is not so much that of disgust as of dulness. The picture is not only extravagant, but bald and tame in the highest degree; while the story is not enlivened by any of those numerous and uncommon incidents which are detailed in the two first parts, with such an inimitable air of probability as almost to persuade us of their reality. For the rest, we have observed already, that the scope of the whole work, and indeed of all his writings, is to degrade and vilify human nature; and though some of the images which occur in this part may be rather coarser than the others, we do not think the difference so considerable as to account for its admitted inferiority in the power of pleasing.

His only other considerable works in prose, are the "Polite Conversation," which we think admirable in its sort, and excessively entertaining; and the "Directions to Servants," which, though of a lower pitch, contains as much perhaps of his peculiar, vigorous, and racy humour, as any one of his productions. The Journal to Stella, which was certainly never intended for publication, is not to be judged of as a literary work at all —

but to us it is the most interesting of all his productions — exhibiting not only a minute and masterly view of a very extraordinary political crisis, but a truer, and, upon the whole, a more favourable, picture of his own mind, than can be gathered from all the rest of his writings — together with innumerable anecdotes characteristic not only of various eminent individuals, but of the private manners and public taste and morality of the times, more nakedly and surely authentic than any thing that can be derived from contemporary publications.

Of his poetry, we do not think there is much to be said; — for we cannot persuade ourselves that Swift was in any respect a poet. It would be proof enough, we think, just to observe, that, though a popular and most miscellaneous writer, he does not mention the name of Shakspeare above two or three times in any part of his works, and has nowhere said a word in his praise. His partial editor admits that he has produced nothing which can be called either sublime or pathetic; and we are of the same opinion as to the beautiful. The merit of correct rhymes and easy diction, we shall not deny him; but the diction is almost invariably that of the most ordinary prose, and the matter of his pieces no otherwise poetical, than that the Muses and some other persons of the heathen mythology are occasionally mentioned. He has written lampoons and epigrams, and satirical ballads and abusive songs in great abundance, and with infinite success. But these things are not poetry; — and are better in verse than in prose, for no other reason than that the sting is more easily remembered, and the ridicule occasionally enhanced, by the hint of a ludicrous parody, or the drollery of an extraordinary rhyme. His witty verses, where they are not made up of mere filth and venom, seem mostly framed on the model of Hudibras; and are chiefly remarkable, like those of his original, for the easy and apt application of homely and familiar phrases, to illustrate ingenious sophistry or unexpected allusions. One or two of his imitations of Horace are executed with spirit and elegance, and are the best, we think, of his familiar pieces; unless we except the verses on his own death, in which, however, the great charm arises, as we have just stated, from the singular ease and exactness with which he has imitated the style of ordinary society, and the neatness with which he has brought together and reduced to metre such a number of natural, characteristic, and commonplace expressions. The Cadenus and Vanessa is, of itself, complete proof that he had in him none of the elements of poetry. It was written when his faculties were in their perfection, and his heart animated with all the tenderness of which it was ever capable — and yet it is as cold and as flat as the ice of Thule. Though describing a real passion, and a real perplexity, there is not a spark of fire nor a throb of emotion in it from one end to the other. All the return he makes to the warm-hearted creature who had put her destiny into his hands, consists in a frigid mythological fiction, in which he sets forth, that Venus and the Graces lavished their gifts on her in her infancy, and moreover got Minerva, by a trick, to inspire her with wit and wisdom. The style is mere prose — or rather a string of familiar and vulgar phrases tacked together in rhyme, like the general tissue of his poetry. However, it has been called not only easy but elegant, by some indulgent critics — and therefore, as we take it for granted nobody reads it now-a-days, we shall extract a few lines at random, to abide the censure of the judicious. To us they seem to be about as much poetry as so many lines out of Coke upon Littleton.

" But in the poets we may find
A wholesome law, time out of mind,
Had been confirm'd by Fate's decree,
That gods, of whatsoe'er degree,
Resume not what themselves have given,
Or any brother god in Heaven:
Which keeps the peace among the gods,
Or they must always be at odds:
And Pallas, if she broke the laws,
Must yield her foe the stronger cause;
A shame to one so much adored
For wisdom at Jove's council board;
Besides, she fear'd the Queen of Love
Would meet with better friends above.
And though she must with grief reflect,
To see a mortal virgin deck'd
With graces hitherto unknown
To female breasts, except her own:
Yet she would act as best became
A goddess of unspotted fame.
She knew, by augury divine,
Venus would fail in her design:
She studied well the point, and found
Her foe's conclusions were not sound,
From premises erroneous brought;
And therefore the deduction's naught,
And must have contrary effects
To what her treacherous foe expects." Vol. xiv. p. 448, 449.

The Rhapsody on Poetry, and the Legion Club, are the only two pieces in which there is the least glow of poetical animation; though, in the latter, it takes the shape of ferocious and almost frantic invective, and, in the former, shines out by fits in the midst of the usual small wares of cant phrases and snappish misanthropy. In the Rhapsody, the following lines, for instance, near the beginning, are vigorous and energetic:—

" Not empire to the rising sun
By valour, conduct, fortune won;
Not highest wisdom in debates
For framing laws to govern states;
Not skill in sciences profound
So large to grasp the circle round;
Such heavenly influence require,
As how to strike the Muse's lyre.
Not beggar's brat on bulk begot;
Not bastard of a pedlar Scot;
Not boy brought up to cleaning shoes,
The spawn of bridewell or the stews;
Not infants dropp'd, the spurious pledges
Of gipsies littering under hedges;
Are so disqualified by fate
To rise in church, or law, or state,
As he whom Phœbus in his ire
Has blasted with poetic fire." Vol. xiv. p. 310, 311.

Yet, immediately after this nervous and poetical line, he drops at once into the lowness of vulgar flippancy:—

" What hope of custom in the fair,
While not a soul demands your ware?" &c.

There are undoubtedly many strong lines and much cutting satire in this

poem; but the staple is a mimicry of Hudibras, without the richness or compression of Butler; as, for example,

> "And here a simile comes pat in:
> Though chickens take a month to fatten,
> The guests in less than half an hour
> Will more than half a score devour.
> So, after toiling twenty days
> To earn a stock of pence and praise,
> Thy labours, grown the critic's prey,
> Are swallow'd o'er a dish of tea:
> Gone to be never heard of more,
> Gone where the chickens went before.
> How shall a new attempter learn
> Of different spirits to discern,
> And how distinguish which is which,
> The poet's vein, or scribbling itch?" Vol. xiv. p. 311, 312.

The Legion Club is a satire, or rather a tremendous invective on the Irish House of Commons, who had incurred the reverend author's displeasure for entertaining some propositions about alleviating the burden of the tithes in Ireland; and is chiefly remarkable, on the whole, as a proof of the extraordinary liberty of the press which was indulged to the disaffected in those days—no prosecution having been instituted, either by that honourable House itself, or by any of the individual members, who are there attacked in a way in which no public men were ever attacked, before or since. It is also deserving of attention, as the most thoroughly animated, fierce, and energetic of all Swift's metrical compositions; and though the animation be altogether of a ferocious character, and seems occasionally to verge upon absolute insanity, there is still a force and a terror about it which redeems it from ridicule, and makes us shudder at the sort of demoniacal inspiration with which the malison is vented. The invective of Swift appears in this, and some other pieces, like the infernal fire of Milton's rebel angels, which

> "Scorch'd and blasted and o'erthrew—"

and was lanched even against the righteous with such impetuous fury,

> "That whom it hit none on their feet might stand,
> Though standing else as rocks—but down they fell
> By thousands, angel on archangel roll'd."

It is scarcely necessary to remark, however, that there is never the least approach to dignity or nobleness in the style of these terrible invectives; and that they do not even pretend to the tone of a high-minded disdain or generous impatience of unworthiness. They are honest, coarse, and violent effusions of furious anger and rancorous hatred; and their effect depends upon the force, heartiness, and apparent sincerity with which those feelings are expressed. The author's object is simply to vilify his opponent,—by no means to do honour to himself. If he can make his victim writhe, he cares not what may be thought of his tormentor;—or rather, he is contented, provided he can make *him* sufficiently disgusting, that a good share of the filth which he throws should stick to his own fingers; and that he should himself excite some of the loathing of which his enemy is the principal object. In the piece now before us, many of the personalities are too coarse and filthy to be quoted; but the very opening shows the spirit in which it is written.

" As I stroll the city, oft I
See a building large and lofty,
Not a bow-shot from the college,
Half the globe from sense and knowledge;
By the prudent architect,
Placed against the church direct,
Making good my grandam's jest,
'Near the church'—you know the rest.
" Tell us, what the pile contains?
Many a head that holds no brains.
These demoniacs let me dub
With the name of Legion Club.
Such assemblies, you might swear,
Meet when butchers bait a bear:
Such a noise, and such haranguing,
When a brother thief is hanging:
Such a rout and such a rabble
Run to hear Jack-pudding gabble:
Such a crowd their ordure throws
On a far less villain's nose.
" Could I from the building's top
Hear the rattling thunder drop,
While the devil upon the roof
(If the devil be thunder-proof)
Should with poker fiery red
Crack the stones, and melt the lead;
Drive them down on every scull,
When the den of thieves is full;
Quite destroy the harpies' nest;
How might then our isle be blest!
" Let them, when they once get in,
Sell the nation for a pin;
While they sit a-picking straws,
Let them rave at making laws;
While they never hold their tongue,
Let them dabble in their dung;
Let them form a grand committee,
How to plague and starve the city;
Let them stare, and storm, and frown
When they see a clergy gown;
Let them, ere they crack a louse,
Call for the orders of the House;
Let them, with their gosling quills,
Scribble senseless heads of bills;
We may, while they strain their throats,
Wipe our —— with their votes.
" Let Sir Tom, that rampant ass,
Stuff his guts with flax and grass;
But, before the priest he fleeces,
Tear the Bible all to pieces;
At the parsons, Tom, halloo, boy!
Worthy offspring of a shoeboy,
Footman! traitor! vile seducer!
Perjured rebel! bribed accuser!
Lay thy paltry privilege aside,
Sprung from Papists, and a regicide!
Fall a working like a mole,
Raise the dirt about your hole!" Vol. x. p. 548—550.

This is strong enough, we suspect, for most readers; but we shall venture on a few lines more, to show the tone in which the leading

characters in the country might be libelled by name and surname in those days.

" In the porch Briareus stands,
Shows a bribe in all his hands;
Briareus the secretary,
But we mortals call him Carey.
When the rogues their country fleece,
They may hope for pence apiece.
" Clio, who had been so wise
To put on a fool's disguise,
To bespeak some approbation,
And be thought a near relation,
When she saw three hundred brutes
All involved in wild disputes,
Roaring till their lungs were spent,
PRIVILEGE OF PARLIAMENT!
Now a new misfortune feels,
Dreading to be laid by th' heels,' &c.
" Keeper, show me show me where to fix
On the puppy pair of Dicks:
By their lantern jaws and leathern,
You might swear they both are brethren:
Dick Fitzbaker, Dick the player!
Old acquaintance are you there?
Dear companions, hug and kiss,
Toast Old Glorious in your ——;
Tie them, keeper, in a tether,
Let them starve and stink together;
Both are apt to be unruly,
Lash them daily, lash them duly;
Though 'tis hopeless to reclaim them,
Scorpion rods, perhaps, may tame them." Vol. x. 553, 554.

Such were the libels which a Tory writer found it safe to publish under a Whig administration in 1736; and we do not find that any national disturbance arose from their impunity,—though the libeller was the most celebrated and by far the most popular writer of the age. Nor was it merely the exasperation of bad fortune that put that polite party upon the use of this discourteous style of discussion. In all situations, the Tories have been the great libellers — and, as it is fitting, the great prosecutors of libels; and even in this early age of their glory, had themselves, when in power, encouraged the same licence of defamation, and in the same hands. It will scarcely be believed, that the following character of the Earl of Wharton, then actually Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, was publicly printed and sold, with his Lordship's name and addition at full length, in 1710, and was one of the first productions by which the reverend penman bucklered the cause of the Tory ministry, and revenged himself on a parsimonious patron. We cannot afford to give it at full length — but this specimen will answer our purpose.

" Thomas, Earl of Wharton, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, by the force of a wonderful constitution, has some years passed his grand climacteric, without any visible effects of old age, either on his body or his mind; and in spite of a continual prostitution to those vices which usually wear out both. His behaviour is in all the forms of a young man at five-and-twenty. Whether he walks, or whistles, or talks bawdy, or calls names, he acquits himself in each, beyond a templar of three years' standing. — He seems to be but an ill dissembler, and an ill liar, although they are the two talents he most practises, and most values himself upon. The ends he has gained by lying, appear to be more owing to the frequency, than

the art of them; his lies being sometimes detected in an hour, often in a day, and always in a week. He tells them freely in mixed companies, although he knows half of those that hear him to be his enemies, and is sure they will discover them the moment they leave him. He swears solemnly he loves, and will serve you; and your back is no sooner turned, but he tells those about him, you are a dog and a rascal. He goes constantly to prayers in the forms of his place, and will talk bawdy and blasphemy at the chapel-door. He is a presbyterian in politics, and an atheist in religion; but he chooses at present to whore with a papist. — He has sunk his fortune by endeavouring to ruin one kingdom, and has raised it by going far in the ruin of another.

" He bears the gallantries of his lady with the indifference of a stoic; and thinks them well recompensed, by a return of children to support his family, without the fatigues of being a father.

" He has three predominant passions, which you will seldom find united in the same man, as arising from different dispositions of mind, and naturally thwarting each other: these are, love of power, love of money, and love of pleasure; they ride him sometimes by turns, sometimes all together. Since he went into Ireland, he seems most disposed to the second, and has met with great success; having gained by his government, of under two years, five and forty thousand pounds by the most favourable computation, half in the regular way, and half in the prudential.

" He was never yet known to refuse, or keep a promise, as I remember he told a lady, but with an exception to the promise he then made (which was to get her a pension); yet he broke even that, and, I confess, deceived us both. But here I desire to distinguish between a promise and a bargain; for he will be sure to keep the latter, when he has the fairest offer." Vol. iv. p. 149—152.

We have not left ourselves room now to say much of Swift's style, or of the general character of his literary genius: — But our opinion may be collected from the remarks we have made on particular passages, and from our introductory observations on the school or class of authors with whom he must undoubtedly be rated. On the subjects to which he confines himself, he is unquestionably a strong, masculine, and perspicuous writer. He is never finical, fantastic, or absurd—takes advantage of no equivocations in argument — and puts on no tawdriness for ornament. Dealing always with particulars, he is safe from all great and systematic mistakes; and, in fact, reasons mostly in a series of small and minute propositions, in the handling of which, dexterity is more requisite than genius; and practical good sense, with an exact knowledge of transactions, of far more importance than profound and high-reaching judgment. He did not write history or philosophy, but party pamphlets and journals; — not satire, but particular lampoons; — not pleasantries for all mankind, but jokes for a particular circle. Even in his pamphlets, the broader questions of party are always waved, to make way for discussions of personal or immediate interest. His object is not to show that the Tories have better principles of government than the Whigs, — but to prove Lord Oxford an angel, and Lord Somers a fiend, — to convict the Duke of Marlborough of avarice, or Sir Richard Steele of insolvency; — not to point out the wrongs of Ireland, in the depression of her Catholic population, her want of education, or the discouragement of her industry; but to raise an outcry against an amendment of the copper or the gold coin, or against a parliamentary proposition for remitting the tithe of *agistment*. For those ends, it cannot be denied, that he chose his means judiciously, and used them with incomparable skill and spirit: but to choose such ends, we humbly conceive, was not the part either of a high intellect or a high character; and his genius must share in the disparagement which ought perhaps to be confined to the impetuosity and vindictiveness of his temper.

Of his style, it has been usual to speak with great, and, we think, exaggerated praise. It is less mellow than Dryden's — less elegant than Pope's or Addison's — less free and noble than Lord Bolingbroke's — and utterly without the glow and loftiness which belonged to our earlier masters. It is radically a low and homely style — without grace, and affectation; and chiefly remarkable for a great choice and profusion of *common* words and expressions. Other writers, who have used a plain and direct style, have been for the most part jejune and limited in their diction, and generally give us an impression of the poverty as well as the tameness of their language; but Swift, without ever trespassing into figured or poetical expressions, or ever employing a word that can be called fine, or pedantic, has a prodigious variety of good set phrases always at his command, and displays a sort of homely richness, like the plenty of an old English dinner, or the wardrobe of a wealthy burgess. This taste for the plain and substantial was fatal to his poetry, which subsists not on such elements; but was in the highest degree favourable to the effect of his humour, very much of which depends on the imposing gravity with which it is delivered, and on the various turns and heightenings it may receive from a rapidly shifting and always appropriate expression. Almost all his works, after the Tale of a Tub, seem to have been written very fast, and with very little minute care of the diction. For his own ease, therefore, it is probable they were all pitched on a low key, and set about on the ordinary tone of a familiar letter or conversation; as that from which there was little hazard of falling, even in moments of negligence, and from which any rise that could be effected must always be easy and conspicuous. A man fully possessed of his subject, indeed, and confident of his cause, may almost always write with vigour and effect, if he can get over the temptation of writing finely, and really confine himself to the strong and clear exposition of the matter he has to bring forward. Half of the affectation and offensive pretension we meet with in authors, arises from a want of matter, — and the other half, from a paltry ambition of being eloquent and ingenious out of place. Swift had complete confidence in himself; and had too much real business on his hands, to be at leisure to intrigue for the fame of a fine writer; — in consequence of which, his writings are more admired by the judicious than if he had bestowed all his attention on their style. He was so much a man of business, indeed, and so much accustomed to consider his writings merely as means for the attainment of a practical end — whether that end was the strengthening of a party, or the wounding a foe — that he not only disdained the reputation of a composer of pretty sentences, but seems to have been thoroughly indifferent to all sorts of literary fame. He enjoyed the notoriety and influence which he had procured by his writings; but it was the glory of having carried his point, and not of having written well, that he valued. As soon as his publications had served their turn, they seem to have been entirely forgotten by their author; — and, desirous as he was of being richer, he appears to have thought as little of making money as immortality by means of them. He mentions somewhere, that except 300*l.* which he got for Gulliver, he never made a farthing by any of his writings. Pope understood his trade better, and not only made knowing bargains for his own works, but occasionally borrowed his friends' pieces, and pocketed the price of the whole. This was notoriously the case with three volumes of Miscellanies, of which the greater part were from the pen of Swift.

In humour and in irony, and in the talent of debasing and defiling

what he hated, we join with all the world in thinking the Dean of St. Patrick's without a rival. His humour, though sufficiently marked and peculiar, is not to be easily defined. The nearest description we can give of it, would make it consist in expressing sentiments the most absurd and ridiculous—the most shocking and atrocious—or sometimes the most energetic and original—in a sort of composed, calm, and unconscious way, as if they were plain, undeniable, commonplace truths, which no person could dispute, or expect to gain credit by announcing—and in maintaining them, always in the gravest and most familiar language, with a consistency which somewhat palliates their extravagance, and a kind of perverted ingenuity, which seems to give pledge for their sincerity. The secret, in short, seems to consist in employing the language of humble good sense, and simple undoubting conviction, to express, in their honest nakedness, sentiments which it is usually thought necessary to disguise under a thousand pretences—or truths which are usually introduced with a thousand apologies. The basis of the art is the personating a character of great simplicity and openness, for whom the common moral or artificial distinctions of society are supposed to have no existence; and making use of this character as an instrument to strip vice and folly of their disguises, and expose guilt in all its deformity, and truth in all its terrors. Independent of the moral or satire, of which they may thus be the vehicle, a great part of the entertainment to be derived from works of humour arises from the contrast between the grave unsuspecting indifference of the character personated, and the ordinary feelings of the world on the subjects which he discusses. This contrast it is easy to heighten, by all sorts of imputed absurdities: in which case, the humour degenerates into mere farce and buffoonery. Swift has yielded a little to this temptation in the Tale of a Tub; but scarcely at all in Gulliver, or any of his later writings in the same style. Of his talent for reviling, we have already said at least enough, in some of the preceding pages.*

COWPER. †

HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER AND MERIT AS AN AUTHOR. ‡

THE personal character of Cowper is easily estimated, from the writings he has left, and the anecdotes contained in this publication. He seems to have been chiefly remarkable for a certain feminine gentleness and delicacy of character, that shrunk back from all that was boisterous, presumptuous, or rude. His secluded life, and awful impressions of reli-

* The foregoing article has been ascribed by contemporary critics to Mr. Jeffrey. At the time of its publication, it elicited a good deal of discussion from the periodical press. A pamphlet was published in reply, condemnatory of its severity and partiality. It was entitled "A Defence of Dr. Jonathan Swift, in answer to certain Objections on his Life and Writings in No. lviii. of the Edinburgh Review," and noticed at length in the Edinburgh Monthly Review for July, 1820.

† See remarks on the religious opinions of Cowper, in an able review of the Life of Reginald Heber, Vol. lii. p. 431.

‡ Hayley's Life of Cowper.—Vol. ii. p. 80. April, 1803.

gion, concurred in fixing upon his manners something of a saintly purity and decorum, and in cherishing that pensive and contemplative turn of mind by which he was so much distinguished. His temper appears to have been yielding and benevolent; and though sufficiently steady and confident in the opinions he had adopted, he was very little inclined, in general, to force them upon the conviction of others. The warmth of his religious zeal made an occasional exception: but the habitual temper of his mind was toleration and indulgence; and it would be difficult, perhaps, to name a satirical and popular author so entirely free from jealousy and fastidiousness, or so much disposed to show the most liberal and impartial favour to the merit of others in literature, in politics, and in the virtues and accomplishments of social life. No angry or uneasy passions, indeed, seem at any time to have found a place in his bosom; and, being incapable of malevolence himself, he probably passed through life without having once excited that feeling in the breast of another.

As the whole of Cowper's works are now before the public, and as death has finally closed the account of his defects and excellencies, the public voice may soon be expected to proclaim the balance, and to pronounce that impartial and irrevocable sentence which is to assign him his just rank and station in the poetical commonwealth, and to ascertain the value and extent of his future reputation. As the success of his works has, in a great measure, anticipated this sentence, it is the less presumptuous in us to offer our opinion of them.

The great merit of this writer appears to us to consist in the boldness and originality of his composition, and in the fortunate audacity with which he has carried the dominion of poetry into regions that had been considered as inaccessible to her ambition. The gradual refinement of taste had, for nearly a century, been weakening the figure of original genius. Our poets had become timid and fastidious, and circumscribed themselves both in the choice and the management of their subjects, by the observance of a limited number of models, who were thought to have exhausted all the legitimate resources of the art. Cowper was one of the first who crossed this enchanted circle, who regained the natural liberty of invention, and walked abroad in the open field of observation as freely as those by whom it was originally trodden; he passed from the imitation of poets to the imitation of nature, and ventured boldly upon the representation of objects that had not been sanctified by the description of any of his predecessors. In the ordinary occupations and duties of domestic life, and the consequences of modern manners, in the common scenery of a rustic situation, and the obvious contemplation of our public institutions, he has found a multitude of subjects for ridicule and reflection, for pathetic and picturesque description, for moral declamation, and devotional rapture, that would have been looked upon with disdain, or with despair, by most of our poetical adventurers. He took as wide a range in language, too, as in matter; and, shaking off the tawdry encumbrance of that poetical diction which had nearly reduced the art to the skilful collocation of a set of appropriated phrases, he made no scruple to set down in verse every expression that would have been admitted in prose, and to take advantage of all the varieties with which our language could supply him.

But while, by the use of this double licence, he extended the sphere of poetical composition, and communicated a singular character of freedom, force, and originality, to his own performances, it must not be

dissembled, that the presumption which belongs to most innovators has betrayed him into many defects. In disdaining to follow the footsteps of others, he has frequently mistaken the way, and has been exasperated, by their blunders, to rush into an opposite extreme. In his contempt for their scrupulous selection of topics, he has introduced some that are unquestionably low and uninteresting; and in his zeal to strip off the tinsel and embroidery of their language, he has torn it (like Jack's coat in the Tale of a Tub) into terrible rents and beggarly tatters. He is a great master of English, and evidently values himself upon his skill and facility in the application of its rich and diversified idioms: but he has indulged himself in this exercise a little too fondly, and has degraded some grave and animated passages by the unlucky introduction of expressions unquestionably too colloquial and familiar. His impatience of control, and his desire to have a great scope and variety in his compositions, have led him not only to disregard all order and method so entirely in their construction, as to have made each of his larger poems professedly a complete miscellany, but also to introduce into them a number of subjects, that prove not to be very susceptible of poetical discussion. There are specimens of argument, and dialogue, and declamation, in his works, that partake very little of the poetical character, and make rather an awkward appearance in a metrical production, though they might have had a lively and brilliant effect in an essay or a sermon. The structure of his sentences, in like manner, has frequently much more of the copiousness and looseness of oratory, than the brilliant compactness of poetry; and he heaps up phrases and circumstances upon each other, with a profusion that is frequently dazzling, but which reminds us as often of the exuberance of a practised speaker, as of the holy inspiration of a poet.

Mr. Hayley has pronounced a warm eulogium on the satirical talents of his friend: but it does not appear to us, either that this was the style in which he was qualified to excel, or that he has made a judicious selection of subjects upon which to exercise it. There is something too keen and vehement in his invective, and an excess of austerity in his doctrine, that is not atoned for by the truth or the beauty of his descriptions. Foppery and affectation are not such hateful and gigantic vices, as to deserve all the anathemas that are bestowed upon them; nor can we believe that soldiership, or Sunday music, have produced all the terrible effects which he ascribes to them. There is something very undignified, too, to say no worse of them, in the protracted parodies and mock-heroic passages with which he seeks to enliven some of his gravest productions. The *Sofa* (for instance, in the *Task*,) is but a feeble imitation of "The Splendid Shilling;" the *Monitor* is a copy of something still lower; and the tedious directions for *raising cucumbers*, which begin with calling a hotbed "a *stercorarious* heap," seem to have been intended as a counterpart to the tragedy of Tom Thumb. All his serious pieces contain some fine devotional passages; but they are not without a taint of that enthusiastic intolerance which religious zeal seems so often to produce. In a few places, there are symptoms of superstition, also, that do not produce even a good poetical effect. The story of "Young Misagathus," whose horse pitched him over its head into the sea, as a punishment for his blasphemy, is fit only for the Missionary or the Wonderful Magazine.

It is impossible to say any thing of the defects of Cowper's writings without taking notice of the occasional harshness and inelegance of his versification. From his correspondence, however, it appears that this was not

with him the effect of negligence merely, but that he really imagined that a rough and incorrect line now and then, had a very agreeable effect in a composition of any length. This prejudice, we believe, is as old as Cowley among English writers; but we do not know that it has of late received the sanction of any one poet of eminence. In truth, it does not appear to be at all capable of defence. The very essence of versification is uniformity; and while any thing like versification is preserved, it is evident that uniformity continues to be aimed at. What pleasure is to be derived from an occasional failure in this aim, we cannot exactly understand. It must afford the same gratification, we should imagine, to have one of the buttons on a coat a little larger than the rest, or one or two of the pillars in a colonnade a little out of the perpendicular. If variety is wanted, let it be variety of excellence, and not a relief of imperfection: Let the writer alter the measure of his piece, if he thinks its uniformity disagreeable; or let him interchange it every now and then, if he thinks proper, with passages of plain and professed prose; but do not let him torture an intractable scrap of prose into the appearance of verse, nor slip in an illegitimate line or two among the genuine currency of his poem. It can afford no pleasure, we should imagine, to a reviewing general to see a miserable rickety and distorted creature staggering along in uniform amidst the tall and stately battalions that march past in splendid regularity before him.

There is another view of this matter that has a little more reason in it. A smooth and harmonious verse is not so easily written, as a harsh and clumsy one: and in order to make it smooth and elegant, the strength and force of the expression must often be sacrificed. This seems to have been Cowper's view of the subject, at least in one passage. "Give me," says he, in a letter to his publisher, "a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their smoothness to recommend them." It is obvious, however, that this is not a defence of harsh versification, but a confession of inability to write smoothly. Why should not harmony and meaning go together? It is difficult, to be sure; and so it is, to make meaning and verse of any kind go together: but it is the business of a poet to overcome these difficulties, and if he do not overcome them both, he is plainly deficient in an accomplishment that others have attained. To those who find it impossible to pay due attention both to the sound and the sense, we would not only address the preceding exhortation of Cowper, but should have no scruple to exclaim, "Give us a sentence of plain prose, full of spirit and meaning, rather than a poem of any kind that has nothing but its versification to recommend it."

Though it be impossible, therefore, to read the productions of Cowper, without being delighted with his force, his brilliancy, and his variety; and although the enchantment of his moral enthusiasm frequently carries us insensibly through all the mazes of his digressions; it is equally true, that we can scarcely read a single page with attention, without being offended at some coarseness or lowness of expression, or disappointed by some "most lame and impotent conclusion." The dignity of his rhetorical periods is often violated by the intrusion of some vulgar and colloquial idiom, and the full and transparent stream of his diction is broken upon some obstreperous verse, or lost in the dull stagnation of a piece of absolute prose. The effect of his ridicule is sometimes impaired by the acrimony with which it is attended; and the exquisite beauty of his moral painting and religious views is injured in no small degree by the darkness of the

shades which his enthusiasm and austerity have occasionally thrown upon the canvas. With all these defects, however, Cowper will probably very long retain his popularity with the readers of English poetry. The great variety and truth of his descriptions; the minute and correct painting of those home-scenes, and private feelings, with which every one is internally familiar; the sterling weight and sense of most of his observations; and, above all, the great appearance of facility with which every thing is executed, and the happy use he has so often made of the most common and ordinary language; all concur to stamp upon his poems the character of original genius, and remind us of the merits that have secured immortality to Shakspeare.

After having said so much upon the original writings of Cowper, we cannot take our leave of him without adding a few words upon the merits of the translation with which we have found him engaged for so considerable a portion of his life. That the translation is a great deal more close and literal than any that had previously been attempted in English verse, probably will not be disputed by those who are the least disposed to admire it: that the style into which it is translated is a true English style, though not perhaps a very elegant or poetical one, may also be assumed; but we are not sure that a rigid and candid criticism will go farther in its commendation. The language is often very tame, and even vulgar: and there is by far too great a profusion of antiquated and colloquial forms of expression. In the dialogue part, the idiomatical and familiar turn of the language has often an animated and happy effect; but in orations of dignity, this dramatical licence is frequently abused, and the translation approaches to a parody. In the course of one page, we observe that Nestor undertakes "to entreat Achilles *to a calm*." Agamemnon calls him, "this wrangler here." And the godlike Achilles himself complains of being treated like "a *fellow* of no worth."

"Ye critics say,
How poor to this was Homer's style!"

In translating a poetical writer, there are two kinds of fidelity to be aimed at. Fidelity to the *matter*, and fidelity to the *manner*, of the original. The best translation would be that, certainly, that preserved both. But, as this is generally impracticable, some concessions must be made upon both sides, and the largest upon that which will be least regretted by the common readers of the translation. Now, though antiquarians and moral philosophers may take great delight in contemplating the state of manners, opinions, and civilisation, that prevailed in the age of Homer, and be offended, of course, at any disguise or modern embellishment that may be thrown over his representations, still, this will be but a secondary consideration with most readers of poetry; and if the smoothness of the verse, the perspicuity of the expression, or the vigour of the sentiment, must be sacrificed to the observance of this rigid fidelity, they will generally be of opinion, that it ought rather to have been sacrificed to them, and that the *poetical beauty* of the original was better worth preserving than the literal import of his expressions. The splendour and magnificence of the Homeric diction and versification is altogether as essential a part of his composition, as the sense and the meaning which they convey. His poetical reputation depends quite as much on the one as on the other; and a translator must give but a very imperfect and unfaithful copy of his original, if he leave out the half of those qualities in which the excellence of the original consisted. It is an indispensable part of his

duty, therefore, to imitate the harmony and elevation of his author's language, as well as to express his meaning; and he is equally unjust and unfaithful to his original, in passing over the beauties of his diction, as in omitting or disguising his sentiments. In Cowper's elaborate version, there are certainly some striking and vigorous passages, and the closeness of the translation continually recalls the original to the memory of a classical reader; but he will look in vain for the melodious and elevated language of Homer in the unpolished verses and colloquial phraseology of his translator.*

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Of Cowper's letters, we may safely assert, that we have rarely met with any similar collection, of superior interest or beauty. Though the incidents to which they relate be of no public magnitude or moment, and the remarks which they contain be not uniformly profound or original, yet there is something in the sweetness and facility of the diction, and more, perhaps, in the glimpses they afford of a pure and benevolent mind, that diffuses a charm over the whole collection, and communicates an interest that cannot always be commanded by performances of greater dignity and pretension. This interest was promoted and assisted, no doubt, in a considerable degree, by that curiosity which always seeks to penetrate into the privacy of celebrated men, and which had been almost entirely frustrated in the instance of Cowper, till the appearance of this publication. Though his writings had long been extremely popular, the author was scarcely known to the public; and having lived in a state of entire seclusion from the world, there were no anecdotes of his conversation, his habits or opinions, in circulation among his admirers. The publication of his correspondence has in a great measure supplied this deficiency; and we now know almost as much of Cowper as we do of those authors who have spent their days in the centre and glare of literary or fashionable notoriety. These letters, however, will continue to be read, long after the curiosity is gratified to which perhaps they owed their first celebrity; for the character with which they make us acquainted, will always attract by its rarity, and engage by its elegance. The feminine delicacy and purity of Cowper's manners and disposition, the romantic and unbroken retirement in which his life was passed, and the singular gentleness and modesty of his whole character, disarm him of those terrors that so often shed an atmosphere of repulsion around the persons of celebrated writers, and make us more indulgent to his weaknesses, and more delighted with his excellences, than if he had been the centre of a circle of wits, or the oracle of a literary confederacy. The interest of this picture is still further heightened by the recollection of that tremendous malady, to the visitations of which he was subject, and by the spectacle of that perpetual conflict which was maintained, through the greater part of his life, between the depression of those constitutional horrors, and the gaiety that resulted from a playful imagination, and a heart animated by the mildest affections.

In the letters now before us, Cowper displays a great deal of all those peculiarities by which his character was adorned or distinguished; he is frequently the subject of his own observations, and often delineates the finer features of his understanding with all the industry and impartiality of a stranger. But the most interesting traits are those which are unin-

* The remarks on Cowper's excellence in epistolary composition are extracted from the review of the third volume of Hayley's Life of him, Vol. iv. p. 273.

tentionally discovered, and which the reader collects from expressions that were employed for very different purposes. Among the most obvious, perhaps, as well as the most important of these, is that extraordinary combination of shyness and ambition, to which we are probably indebted for the very existence of his poetry. Being disqualified, by the former, from vindicating his proper place in the ordinary scenes either of business or of society, he was excited, by the latter, to attempt the only other avenue to reputation that appeared to be open, and to assert the real dignity of the talents with which he felt that he was gifted. If Cowper had acquired courage enough to read the journals of the House of Lords, or been able to get over the diffidence which fettered his utterance in general society, his genius would probably have evaporated in conversation, or been contented with the humbler glory or contributing to the Rolliad or Connoisseur.

CRABBE.*

Mr. Crabbe is the greatest *mannerist*, perhaps, of all our living poets; and it is rather unfortunate that the most prominent features of his mannerism are not the most pleasing. The homely, quaint, and prosaic style — the flat, and often broken and jingling versification — the eternal full-lengths of low and worthless characters, — with their accustomed garnishings of sly jokes and familiar moralising — are all on the surface of his writings; and are almost unavoidably the things by which we are first reminded of him, when we take up any of his new productions. Yet they are not the things that truly constitute his peculiar manner, or give that character by which he will and ought to be remembered with future generations. It is plain, indeed, that they are things that will make nobody remembered — and can never, therefore, be really characteristic of some of the most original and powerful poetry that the world ever saw.

Mr. C., accordingly, has other gifts; and those not less peculiar or less strongly marked than the blemishes with which they are contrasted — an unrivalled and almost magical power of observation, resulting in descriptions so true to nature as to strike us rather as transcripts than imitations — an anatomy of character and feeling not less exquisite and searching — an occasional touch of matchless tenderness — and a deep and dreadful pathetic, interspersed by fits, and strangely interwoven with the most minute and humble of his details. Add to all this the sure and profound sagacity of the remarks with which he every now and then startles us in the midst of very unambitious discussions; — and the weight and terseness of the maxims which he drops, like oracular responses, on occasions that give no promise of such a revelation; — and last, though not least, that sweet and seldom sounded chord of lyrical inspiration, the lightest touch of which instantly charms away all harshness from his numbers, and all lowness from his themes — and at once exalts him to a level with the most energetic and inventive poets of his age.

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* Crabbe's Tales of the Hall. Lond. 1819. — Vol. xxxii. p. 118. July, 1819.

These, we think, are the true characteristics of the genius of this great writer; and it is in their mixture with the oddities and defects to which we have already alluded, that the peculiarity of his manner seems to us substantially to consist. The ingredients may all of them be found, we suppose, in other writers; but their combination — in such proportions at least as occur in this instance — may safely be pronounced to be original.

Extraordinary, however, as this combination must appear, it does not seem very difficult to conceive in what way it may have arisen; and, so far from regarding it as a proof of singular humorousness, caprice, or affectation in the individual, we are rather inclined to hold that something approaching to it must be the natural result of a long habit of observation in a man of a genius, possessed of that temper and disposition which is the usual accompaniment of such a habit; and that the same strangely compounded and apparently incongruous assemblage of themes and sentiments would be frequently produced under such circumstances — if authors had oftener the courage to write from their own impressions, and had less fear of the laugh or wonder of the more shallow and barren part of their readers.

A great talent for observation, and a delight in the exercise of it — the power and the practice of dissecting and disentangling that subtle and complicated tissue of habit, and self-love, and affection, which constitute human character — seems to us, in all cases, to imply a contemplative rather than an active disposition. It can only exist, indeed, where there is a good deal of social sympathy; for, without this, the occupation could excite no interest, and afford no satisfaction, — but only such a measure and sort of sympathy as is gratified by being a spectator, and not an actor on the great theatre of life — and leads its possessor rather to look on with eagerness on the feats and the fortunes of others, than to take a share for himself in the game that is played before him. Some stirring and vigorous spirits there are, no doubt, in which this taste and talent is combined with a more thorough and effective sympathy; and leads to the study of men's characters by an actual and hearty participation in their various passions and pursuits; — though it is to be remarked, that when such persons embody their observations in writing, they will generally be found to show their characters in action, rather than to describe them in the abstract; and to let their various personages disclose themselves and their peculiarities, as it were spontaneously, and without help or preparation, in their ordinary conduct and speech — of all which we have a very splendid and striking example in the Tales of My Landlord, and the other pieces of that extraordinary writer. In the common case, however, a great observer, we believe, will be found, pretty certainly, to be a person of a shy and retiring temper, — who does not mingle enough with the people he surveys, to be heated with their passions, or infected with their delusions — and who has usually been led, indeed, to take up the office of a looker on, from some little infirmity of nerves, or weakness of spirits, which has unfitted him from playing a more active part on the busy scene of existence.

Now, it is very obvious, we think, that this contemplative turn, and this alienation from the vulgar pursuits of mankind, must, in the first place, produce a great contempt for most of those pursuits, and the objects they seek to obtain — a levelling of the factitious distinctions which human pride and vanity have established in the world, and a mingled scorn and compassion for the lofty pretensions under which men

so often disguise the nothingness of their chosen occupations. When the many-coloured scene of life, with all its petty agitations, its shifting pomps and perishable passions, is surveyed by one who does not mix in its business, it is impossible that it should not appear a very pitiable and almost ridiculous affair; or that the heart should not echo back the brief and emphatic exclamation of the mighty dramatist —

——— "Life 's a poor player,
Who frets and struts his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."—

Or the more sarcastic amplification of it, in the words of our great moral poet—

"Behold the Child, by Nature's kindly law,
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw;
Some livelier plaything gives our Youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite:
Scarfs, garters, gold our riper years engage,
And beads and prayerbooks are the *toys* of Age:
Pleased with this bauble still as that before,
Till tired we sleep—and *Life's poor play is o'er!*"

This is the more solemn view of the subject:—but the first fruits of observation are most commonly found to issue in Satire—the unmasking the vain pretenders to wisdom and worth and happiness, with whom society is infested, and holding up to the derision of mankind those meannesses of the great, those miseries of the fortunate, and those

"Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise,"

which the eye of a dispassionate observer so quickly detects under the glittering exterior by which they would fain be disguised—and which bring pretty much to a level the intellect and morals and enjoyments of the great mass of mankind.

This misanthropic end has unquestionably been by far the most common result of a habit of observation, and that in which its effects have most generally terminated:—Yet we cannot bring ourselves to think that it is their just or natural termination. Something, no doubt, will depend on the temper of the individual, and the proportions in which the gall and the milk of human kindness have been originally mingled in his composition.—Yet satirists, we think, have not in general been ill-natured persons—and we are inclined rather to ascribe this limited and uncharitable application of their powers of observation to their love of fame and popularity,—which are well known to be best secured by successful ridicule or invective—or quite as probably, indeed, to the narrowness and insufficiency of their observations themselves, and the imperfection of their talents for their due conduct and extension.—It is certain, at least, we think, that the satirist makes use but of half the discoveries of the observer; and teaches but half—and the worser half—of the lessons which may be deduced from his occupation.—He puts down, indeed, the proud pretensions of the great and arrogant, and levels the vain distinctions which human ambition has established among the brethren of mankind—he

"Bares the mean heart that lurks beneath a star,"

—and destroys the illusions which would limit our sympathy to the forward and figuring persons of this world—the favourites of fame and fortune.—But the true result of observation should be not so much to cast down the proud, as to raise up the lowly—not so much to extinguish our sympathy with the powerful and renowned, as to extend it to

all those who, in humbler conditions, have the same claims on our esteem or affection. — It is not surely the natural consequence of learning to judge truly of the characters of men, that we should despise or be indifferent about them all; — and though we have learned to see through the false glare which plays round the envied summits of existence, and to know how little dignity, or happiness, or worth, or wisdom, may sometimes belong to the possessors of power and fortune and learning and renown, — it does not follow, by any means, that we should look upon the whole of human life as a mere deceit and imposture, or think the concerns of our species fit subjects only for scorn and derision. Our promptitude to admire and to envy will indeed be corrected, our enthusiasm abated, and our distrust of appearances increased; — but the sympathies and affections of our nature will continue, and be better directed — our love of our kind will not be diminished — and our indulgence for their faults and follies, if we read our lesson aright, will be signally strengthened and confirmed. The true and proper effect, therefore, of a habit of observation, and a thorough and penetrating knowledge of human character, will be, not to extinguish our sympathy but to extend it — to turn, no doubt, many a throb of admiration and many a sigh of love into a smile of derision or of pity, but at the same time to reveal much that commands our homage and excites our affection in those humble and unexplored regions of the heart and understanding which never engage the attention of the incurious, — and to bring the whole family of mankind nearer to a level, by finding out latent merits as well as latent defects in all its members, and compensating the flaws that are detected in the boasted ornaments of life, by bringing to light the richness and the lustre that sleep in the mines beneath its surface.

We are afraid some of our readers may not at once perceive the application of these profound remarks to the subject immediately before us. But there are others, we doubt not, who do not need to be told, that they are intended to explain how Mr. Crabbe, and other persons with the same gift of observation, should so often busy themselves with what may be considered as low and vulgar characters; and, declining all dealings with heroes and heroic topics, should not only venture to seek for an interest in the concerns of ordinary mortals, but actually intersperse small pieces of ridicule with their undignified pathos, and endeavour to make their readers look on their books with the same mingled feelings of compassion and amusement with which — unnatural as it may appear to the readers of poetry — they, and all judicious observers, actually look upon human life and human nature. This, we are persuaded, is the true key to the greater part of the peculiarities of the author before us; and though we have disserted upon it a little longer than was necessary, we really think it may enable our readers to comprehend him, and our remarks on him, something better than they could have done without it.

There is, as everybody must have felt, a strange mixture of satire and sympathy in all his productions — a great kindliness and compassion for the errors and sufferings of our poor human nature; but a strong distrust of its heroic virtues and high pretensions. His heart is always open to pity, and all the milder emotions — but there is little aspiration after the grand and sublime of character, nor very much encouragement for raptures and ecstasies of any description. These, he seems to think, are things rather too fine for the said poor human nature — and that, in our low and erring condition, it is a little ridiculous to pretend, either to very exalted and immaculate virtue, or very pure and exquisite happiness.

He not only never meddles, therefore, with the delicate distresses and noble fires of the heroes and heroines of tragic and epic fable, but may generally be detected indulging in a lurking sneer at the pomp and vanity of all such superfine imaginations — and turning to draw men in their true postures and dimensions, and with all the imperfections that actually belong to their condition: — the prosperous and happy overshadowed with passing clouds of *ennui*, and disturbed with little flaws of bad humour and discontent — the great and wise beset at times with strange weaknesses and meannesses and paltry vexations — and even the most virtuous and enlightened falling far below the standard of poetical perfection — and stooping every now and then to paltry jealousies and prejudices — or sinking into shabby sensualities, — or meditating on their own excellence and importance, with a ludicrous and lamentable anxiety.

This is one side of the picture; and characterises sufficiently the satirical vein of our author: but the other is the most extensive and important. In rejecting the vulgar sources of interest in poetical narratives, and reducing his ideal persons to the standard of reality, Mr. C. does by no means seek to extinguish the sparks of human sympathy within us, or to throw any damp on the curiosity with which we naturally explore the characters of each other. On the contrary, he has afforded new and more wholesome food for all those propensities — and, by placing before us those details which our pride or fastidiousness is so apt to overlook, has disclosed, in all their truth and simplicity, the native and unadulterated workings of those affections which are at the bottom of all social interest, and are really rendered less touching by the exaggerations of more ambitious artists — while he exhibits, with admirable force and endless variety, all those combinations of passions and opinions, and all that cross-play of selfishness and vanity, and indolence and ambition, and habit and reason, which make up the intellectual character of individuals, and present to every one an instructive picture of his neighbour or himself. Seeing, by the perfection of his art, the master passions in their springs, and the high capacities in their rudiments — and having acquired the gift of tracing all the propensities and marking tendencies of our plastic nature, in their first slight indications, or from the very disguises they so often love to assume, he does not need, in order to draw out his characters in all their life and distinctness, the vulgar demonstration of those striking and decided actions by which their maturity is proclaimed even to the careless and inattentive; — but delights to point out to his readers the seeds or tender filaments of those talents and feelings and singularities which wait only for occasion and opportunity to burst out and astonish the world — and to accustom them to trace, in characters and actions apparently of the most ordinary description, the self-same attributes that, under other circumstances, would attract universal attention, and furnish themes for the most popular and impassioned descriptions.

That he should not be guided in the choice of his subject by any regard to the rank or condition which his persons hold in society, may easily be imagined; and, with a view to the ends he aims at, might readily be forgiven. But we fear that his passion for observation, and the delight he takes in tracing out and analysing all the little traits that indicate character, and all the little circumstances that influence it, have sometimes led him to be careless about his selection of the instances in which it was to be exhibited, or at least to select them upon principles very different from those which give them an interest in the eyes of ordinary readers. For the purposes of mere anatomy, beauty of form or com-

plexion are things quite indifferent; and the physiologist, who examines plants only to study their internal structure, and to make himself master of all the contrivances by which their various functions are performed, pays no regard to the brilliancy of their hues, the sweetness of their odours, or the graces of their form. Those who come to him for the sole purpose of acquiring knowledge, may participate, perhaps, in this indifference; but the world at large will wonder at them; and he will engage fewer pupils to listen to his instructions, than if he had condescended in some degree to consult their predilections in the beginning. It is the same case, we think, in many respects, with Mr. Crabbe. Relying for the interest he is to produce, on the curious expositions he is to make of the elements of human character; or at least finding his own chief gratification in those subtle investigations, he seems to care very little upon what particular individuals he pitches for the purpose of these demonstrations. Almost every human mind, he seems to think, may serve to display that fine and mysterious mechanism which it is his delight to explore and explain; and almost every condition, and every history of life, afford occasions to show how it may be put into action, and pass through its various combinations. It seems, therefore, almost as if he had caught up the first dozen or two of persons that came across him in the ordinary walks of life, and then opening up his little window in their breasts, and applying his tests and instruments of observation, had set himself about such a minute and curious scrutiny of their whole habits, history, adventures, and dispositions, as he thought must ultimately create not only a familiarity, but an interest, which the first aspect of the subject was far enough from leading any one to expect. That he succeeds more frequently than could have been anticipated, we are very willing to allow. But we cannot help feeling also, that a little more pains bestowed in the selection of his characters, would have made his power of observation and description tell with tenfold effect; and that, in spite of the exquisite truth of his delineations, and the fineness of the perceptions by which he was enabled to make them, it is impossible to take any considerable interest in many of his personages, or to avoid feeling some degree of fatigue at the minute and patient exposition that is made of all that belongs to them.*

PARALLEL BETWEEN CRABBE AND WORDSWORTH.†

THERE is a truth and a force in many of Crabbe's delineations of rustic life, which is calculated to sink deep into the memory; and, being confirmed by daily observation, they are recalled upon innumerable occasions, when the ideal pictures of more fanciful authors have lost all their interest. For ourselves at least, we profess to be indebted to Mr. Crabbe for many of these strong impressions; and have known more than one of our unpoetical acquaintances, who declared they could never pass by a

* Several admirable notices of Crabbe's poetry have appeared in the Edinburgh Review. See Vol. xii. p. 131.; Vol. xvi. p. 30.; Vol. xx. p. 277.

† Crabbe's Poems. Lond. 1808.—Vol. xii. p. 131.

parish workhouse, without thinking of the description of it they had read at school in the Poetical Extracts. The volume before us will renew, we trust, and extend many such impressions. It contains all the former productions of the author, with about double their bulk of new matter; most of it in the same taste and manner of composition with the former, and some of a kind, of which we have had no previous example in this author. The whole, however, is of no ordinary merit, and will be found, we have little doubt, a sufficient warrant for Mr. Crabbe to take his place as one of the most original, nervous, and pathetic poets of the present century.

His characteristic, certainly, is force, and truth of description, joined for the most part to great selection and condensation of expression; that kind of strength and originality which we meet with in Cowper, and that sort of diction and versification which we admire in Goldsmith. If he can be said to have imitated the manner of any author, it is Goldsmith, indeed, who has been the object of his imitation; and yet his general train of thinking, and his views of society, are so extremely opposite, that, when "The Village" was first published, it was commonly considered as an antidote or an answer to the more captivating representations of "The Deserted Village." Compared with this celebrated author, he will be found, we think, to have more vigour and less delicacy; and while he must be admitted to be inferior in the fine finish and uniform beauty of his composition, we cannot help considering him as superior, both in the variety and the truth of his pictures. Instead of that uniform tint of pensive tenderness which overspreads the whole poetry of Goldsmith, we find in Mr. Crabbe many gleams of gaiety and humour. Though his habitual views of life are more gloomy than those of his rival, his poetical temperament seems far more cheerful; and when the occasions of sorrow and rebuke are gone by, he can collect himself for sarcastic pleasantry, or unbend in innocent playfulness. His diction, though generally pure and powerful, is sometimes harsh, and sometimes quaint; and he has occasionally admitted a couplet or two in a state so unfinished, as to give a character of inelegance to the passages in which they occur. With a taste less disciplined and less fastidious than that of Goldsmith, he has, in our apprehension, a keener eye for observation, and a readier hand for the delineation of what he has observed. There is less poetical keeping in his whole performance; but the groups of which it consists are conceived, we think, with equal genius, and drawn with greater spirit as well as greater fidelity.

It is not quite fair, perhaps, thus to draw a detailed parallel between a living poet, and one whose reputation has been sealed by death, and by the immutable sentence of a surviving generation. Yet there are so few of his contemporaries to whom Mr. Crabbe bears any resemblance, that we can scarcely explain our opinion of his merit, without comparing him to some of his predecessors. There is one set of writers, indeed, from whose works those of Mr. Crabbe might receive all that elucidation which results from contrast, and from an entire opposition in all points of taste and opinion. We allude now to the Wordsworths, and the Southeys, and Coleridges, and all that misguided fraternity, that, with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are labouring to bring back our poetry to the fantastical oddity and puling childishness of Withers, Quarles, or Marvel. These gentlemen write a great deal about rustic life, as well as Mr. Crabbe; and they even agree with him in dwelling much on its discomforts: but nothing can be more opposite than the views they take

of the subject, or the manner in which they execute their representation of them.

Mr. Crabbe exhibits the common people of England pretty much as they are, and as they must appear to every one who will take the trouble of examining into their condition; at the same time that he renders his sketches in a very high degree interesting and beautiful, — by selecting what is most fit for description, — by grouping them into such forms as must catch the attention or awake the memory, — and by scattering over the whole, such traits of moral sensibility, of sarcasm, and of useful reflection, as every one must feel to be natural, and own to be powerful. The gentlemen of the new school, on the other hand, scarcely ever condescend to take their subjects from any description of persons that are at all known to the common inhabitants of the world; but invent for themselves certain whimsical and unheard-of beings, to whom they impute some fantastical combination of feelings, and labour to excite our sympathy for them, either by placing them in incredible situations, or by some strained and exaggerated moralisation of a vague and tragical description. Mr. Crabbe, in short, shows us something which we have all seen, and may see, in real life; and draws from it such feelings and such reflections as every human being must acknowledge that it is calculated to excite. He delights us by the truth, and vivid and picturesque beauty, of his representations, and by the force and pathos of the sensations with which we feel that they ought to be connected. Mr. Wordsworth and his associates show us something that mere observation never yet suggested to any one. They introduce us to beings whose existence was not previously suspected by the acutest observers of nature; and excite an interest for them, more by an eloquent and refined analysis of their own capricious feelings, than by any obvious or very intelligible ground of sympathy in their situation. The common sympathies of our nature, and our general knowledge of human character, do not enable us either to understand, or to enter into, the feelings of their characters. They are unique specimens and varieties of our kind, and must be studied under a separate classification. They have an idiosyncrasy, upon which all common occurrences operate in a peculiar manner; and those who are best acquainted with human nature, and with other poetry, are at a loss to comprehend the new system of feeling and of writing which is here introduced to their notice. Instead of the men and women of ordinary humanity, we have certain moody and capricious personages, made after the poet's own heart and fancy, — acting upon principles, and speaking in a language of their own. Thus, instead of employing the plain vulgar character, which may be read by all the world, these writers make use of a sort of cipher, which can only be learned with pains and study; and, dressing up all their persons in a kind of grotesque masquerade habit, they have given birth to a species of composition more fantastic and unnatural than a pastoral or an opera. Into this unnatural composition, however, they have introduced a great deal of eloquence and beauty, and have put many natural thoughts and touching expressions into the mouths of their imaginary persons. By this means, and by the novelty of their manner, they have seduced many into a great admiration of their genius, and even made some willing to believe, that their conception of character is in itself just and natural, and that all preceding writers have been in an error with regard to that great element of poetry. Many, to be sure, found it impossible to understand either their precepts or their example; and, unable to recognise the traits of our common nature in the strange

habiliments with which these ingenious persons had adorned it, gave up the attempt in despair; and, recurring to easier authors, looked on, with mixed wonder and contempt, while they were collecting the suffrages of their admirers. Many, however, did understand a part; and, in their raised imaginations, fancied that they admired the whole: while others, who only guessed at a passage here and there, laboured, by their encomiums, to have it thought that there was nothing which passed their comprehension.

Those who are acquainted with the Lyrical Ballads, or the more recent publication of Mr. Wordsworth, will scarcely deny the justice of this representation; but in order to vindicate it to such as do not enjoy that inestimable advantage, we must beg leave to make a few hasty references to the former, and by far the least exceptionable, of these productions.

A village schoolmaster, for instance, is a pretty common poetical character. Goldsmith has drawn him inimitably; so has Shenstone, with the slight change of sex; and Mr. Crabbe, in two passages, has followed their footsteps. Now, Mr. Wordsworth has a village schoolmaster also — a personage who makes no small figure in three or four of his poems. But by what traits is this worthy old gentleman delineated by the new poet? No pedantry — no innocent vanity of learning — no mixture of indulgence with the pride of power, and of poverty with the consciousness of rare acquirements. Every feature which belongs to the situation, or marks the character in common apprehension, is scornfully discarded by Mr. Wordsworth, who represents this grey-haired rustic pedagogue as a sort of half crazy sentimental person, overrun with fine feelings, constitutional merriment, and a most humorous melancholy. Here are the two stanzas in which this consistent and intelligible character is portrayed. The diction is at least as new as the conception.

> " The sighs which Matthew heard were sighs
> Of one tired out with *fear* and *madness;*
> The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
> Were tears of light—*the oil of gladness.*
>
> Yet sometimes, when the secret cup
> Of still and serious thought went round,
> He seem'd as if he *drank it up,*
> He felt with spirit so profound.
> Thou *soul,* of God's best *earthly mould,*" &c.

A frail damsel is a character common enough in all poems; and one upon which many fine and pathetic lines have been expended. Mr. Wordsworth has written more than three hundred lines on that subject; but, instead of new images of tenderness, or delicate representation of intelligible feelings, he has contrived to tell us nothing whatever of the unfortunate fair one, but that her name is Martha Ray, and that she goes up to the top of a hill, in a red cloak, and cries " O misery!" All the rest of the poem is filled with a description of an old thorn and a pond, and of the silly stories which the neighbouring old women told about them.

The sports of childhood, and the untimely death of promising youth, is also a common topic of poetry. Mr. Wordsworth has made some blank verse about it; but, instead of the delightful and picturesque sketches with which so many authors of moderate talents have presented us on this inviting subject, all that he is pleased to communicate of the rustic child is, that he used to amuse himself with shouting to the owls, and

hearing them answer. To make amends for this brevity, the process of his mimicry is most accurately described.

——— " With fingers interwoven, both hands
Press'd closely, palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him." ——

This is all we hear of him; and for the sake of this one accomplishment, we are told, that the author has frequently stood mute, and gazed on his grave for half an hour together!

Love, and the fantasies of lovers, have afforded an ample theme to poets of all ages. Mr. Wordsworth, however, has thought fit to compose a piece, illustrating this copious subject by one single thought. A lover trots away to see his mistress one fine evening, staring all the way at the moon; when he comes to her door,

" O mercy! to myself I cried,
If Lucy should be dead!"

And there the poem ends!

Now, we leave it to any reader of common candour and discernment to say, whether these representations of character and sentiment are drawn from that eternal and universal standard of truth and nature, which every one is knowing enough to recognise, and no one great enough to depart from with impunity; or whether they are not formed, as we have described them, upon certain fantastic and affected peculiarities in the mind or fancy of the author, into which it is most improbable that many of his readers will enter, and which cannot, in some cases, be comprehended without much effort and explanation. Instead of multiplying instances of these wide and wilful aberrations from ordinary nature, it may be more satisfactory to produce the author's own admission of the narrowness of the plan upon which he writes, and of the very extraordinary circumstances which he himself sometimes thinks it necessary for his readers to keep in view, in order to understand the beauty or propriety of his delineations.

A pathetic tale of guilt or superstition may be told, we are apt to fancy, by the poet himself, in his general character of poet, with full as much effect as by any other person. An old nurse, at any rate, or a monk or parish clerk, is always at hand to give grace to such a narration. None of these, however, would satisfy Mr. Wordsworth. He has written a long poem of this sort, in which he thinks it indispensably necessary to apprise the reader, that he has endeavoured to represent the language and sentiments of a particular character — of which character, he adds, " the reader will have a general notion, if he has ever known a man, *a captain of a small trading vessel*, for example, who, being *past the middle age of life*, has retired upon *an annuity, or small independent income*, to some *village* or country town, of which he was *not a native*, or in which he had not been accustomed to live."

Now, we must be permitted to doubt, whether, among all the readers of Mr. Wordsworth, there is a single individual who has had the happiness of knowing a person of this very peculiar description; or who is capable of forming any sort of conjecture of the particular disposition and turn of thinking which such a combination of attributes would be apt to produce. To us, we will confess, the *annonce* appears as ludicrous and absurd as it would be in the author of an ode or an epic to say, " Of this piece the

reader will necessarily form a very erroneous judgement, unless he is apprised, that it was written by a pale man in a green coat, — sitting cross-legged on an oaken stool, — with a scratch on his nose, and a spelling dictionary on the table." *

From these childish and absurd affectations, we turn with pleasure to the manly sense and correct picturing of Mr. Crabbe; and, after being dazzled and made giddy with the elaborate raptures and obscure originalities of these new artists, it is refreshing to meet again with the spirit and nature of our old masters, in the nervous pages of the author now before us.

DR. DARWIN.

HIS PHILOSOPHICAL SPECULATIONS, AND HIS MERITS AS A POET. †

ONLY a few years have elapsed since the genius of the author of "The Botanic Garden" first burst on the public notice in all its splendour. The novelty of his plan, an imposing air of boldness and originality in his poetical as well as philosophical speculations, and a striking display of command over some of the richest sources of poetical embellishment, were sufficient to

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* Some of our readers may have a curiosity to know in what manner this old annuitant captain expresses himself in the village of his adoption. For their gratification, we annex the two first stanzas of his story, in which, with all the attention we have been able to bestow, we have been utterly unable to detect any characteristic traits, either of a seaman, an annuitant, or a stranger in a country town. It is a style, on the contrary, which we should ascribe, without hesitation, to a certain poetical fraternity in the West of England, and which, we verily believe, never was, and never will be, used by any one out of that fraternity.

"There is a thorn—it looks so old,
In truth you'd find it hard to say,
How it could ever have been young,
It looks so old and grey.
Not higher than a two years' child,
It stands erect, this aged thorn;
No leaves it has, no thorny points;
It is a mass of knotted joints,
A wretched thing forlorn.
It stands erect, and like a stone,
With lichens it is overgrown.

"Like rock or stone, it is o'ergrown
With lichens to the very top,
And hung with heavy tufts of moss,
A melancholy crop.
Up from the earth these mosses creep,
And this poor thorn they clasp it round
So close, you'd say that they were bent,
With plain and manifest intent,
To drag it to the ground;
And all had join'd in one endeavour,
To bury this poor thorn for ever."

† Darwin's Temple of Nature.—Vol. ii. p. 491. July, 1803.

secure to him a large share of approbation, even from the most fastidious readers, and much more than sufficient to attract the gaze, and the indiscriminating acclamations, of a herd of admirers and imitators. Yet, with all these pretensions to permanent fame, we are much deceived, if we have not already observed, in that of Dr. Darwin, the visible symptoms of decay. Whether in consequence of more sober and chastened reflection, or from mere caprice, or from whatever other cause it may have proceeded, his beauties seem to have quickly palled upon the public taste; and his decline from the exalted place he once appeared to hold, has been unhappily accelerated by the ridicule of tasteless and impotent imitation. Still, however, we presume that the former admirers of Dr. Darwin's poetry will turn with some degree of pleasing expectation to this posthumous work; and though we are very far from thinking that it is likely to produce any new fluctuation of opinion, we may safely promise them the satisfaction of recognising the same characteristic manner, and some of the same peculiar excellencies, which distinguish his former compositions. At the same time, we feel little hesitation in stating, that "The Temple of Nature" appears to us, in poetical excellence, to fall far short of "The Botanic Garden;" and that, without possessing an equal share of beauties, its defects are more frequent and obtrusive.

It requires no stretch of candour to admit, that Dr. Darwin was possessed of talents, which, under happier and more judicious direction, might have ensured very great advances in scientific investigation. To great acuteness of observation he joined a singular degree of ingenuity in the combination of particular facts; and with such powers he could scarcely fail of occasional success in attaining original, extensive, and commanding views of his subject. At the same time, his most devoted admirers will hardly venture to dispute that his successes bear no considerable proportion to the number or boldness of his attempts. The causes of these failures do not appear to us to lie very deep; and a few general remarks, in this point of view, on the character of Dr. Darwin's philosophical writings, will supersede a more minute examination of the particular dogmas which form the groundwork of the volume before us.

The fundamental error which appears to us to pervade and infect the whole of Dr. Darwin's scientific speculations, is a presumptuous contempt, or perhaps a gross ignorance, of the legitimate bounds of philosophical enquiry. It may justly excite astonishment, that after all that has been taught on the rules of sound philosophising ever since the days of Bacon, and after the noble examples of their successful application, especially in the physical sciences, which have been exhibited to the imitation of philosophers, there should still be found so many lamentable instances of the waste of genius in the pursuit of false or unattainable objects. Of these instances we consider Dr. Darwin as decidedly the most notorious and most lamentable that has lately occurred. In his attempts to investigate the phenomena of matter, as well as of mind, it is but rarely indeed that we ever find him proceeding in the legitimate road of observation, by which alone it is given to man to penetrate even those parts of nature that are most within his reach; and it can occasion no surprise that, by thus deserting the only sure guide to discovery, he should often insensibly wander into that forbidden ground where observation and discovery are no longer practicable. It is in the choice of such a course that the disgrace of failure consists; for powers of a much higher order than those of Dr. Darwin, when so misdirected, could not have secured a more fortunate issue.

Another error, nearly akin to that we have been describing, but which deserves particular notice, as fatally characterising many of the metaphysical speculations of Dr. Darwin, arises from constantly blending and confounding together the two distinct sciences of matter and of mind. In this censure, we would not be understood as referring directly to that hypothesis of materialism, which is every where assumed by him with the utmost confidence. Ignorant as we are of the nature of matter, beyond a few of its sensible qualities, it would be rash and idle to limit dogmatically the modifications of which it may be susceptible. For similar reasons, indeed, we cannot but regard it as still more rash and unphilosophical to assert the identity of substances, between the known qualities and attributes of which no sameness or analogy have yet been recognised; and in the present state of our knowledge, we should certainly esteem it more rational to adopt that sceptical theory, which rejects the evidence of an alleged identity between matter and the principle of thought, and which rather holds that, in so far as we have any evidence applicable to the question, it tends to the contrary conclusion. But the objection we have here in view, is not aimed at the dogmatical opinions of Dr. Darwin on the nature of mind, but alludes to a favourite mode of investigation, which is completely unphilosophical, inasmuch as it attempts to trace the laws of thought, through the medium of those laws which are solely applicable to unthinking matter. Whatever diversity of opinions may prevail as to the nature of mind, this at least must on all hands be admitted, that there is a class of phenomena, of which our knowledge is derived solely from consciousness; and it appears to us an intuitive proposition, that all our speculations on the laws of these phenomena must be ultimately drawn from the same source. There is another great class of phenomena, of which our knowledge is derived solely from external observation; and from that source, in like manner, must all our speculations respecting them be of necessity derived. We are not *conscious* of the laws which regulate the material world; and no man in his senses ever dreamt of discovering those laws, by turning his thoughts inward upon themselves, any more than, by a similar process, of adding a cubit to his stature. In reversing the process, there seems to be as little propriety, and as little prospect of success. This, however, has been on most occasions the favourite practice of Dr. Darwin; and it is by thus confounding the investigations of physiology and of metaphysics, that he appears to us to have lost himself in that gulf which will probably for ever separate the sciences of matter and of mind. It is no doubt true, that, between the two parts of our constitution, there is a constant action and reaction; and the laws which regulate that connection form of themselves a curious and interesting subject of enquiry. In the investigation of these laws, though the lights which are derived from the two different sources we have mentioned may be sometimes thrown together upon the different parts of a complex phenomenon, yet they can never be suffered to cross or become blended with each other, without violating a fundamental principle of physical as well as metaphysical science.

Under the influence of such mistaken views of the objects and methods of philosophical enquiry, it is evident that no superiority of talents could have secured him against ultimate failure; but, even independently of these considerations, Dr. Darwin's prospects of success in the pursuits of science do not appear to have been extremely promising. While we allow him the credit of much curious knowledge, and of great ingenuity in the application of it, it is impossible to deny that he frequently betrays a want

of discernment in the proper evidence of facts, and a strange incapacity for strict inductive reasoning, even from the facts he chooses to assume and bring together. He is ever aiming at the construction of a vast and comprehensive system, but with powers and preparation by no means equal to the task; and his puerile impatience for the completion of his design leaves him but little room for nicety in the choice or compact arrangement of his materials. His ardent imagination and sanguine temper seem to have supplied or concealed the real weakness of this slovenly workmanship; but his own confidence is rarely of a kind to inspire others with the feeling of security. His reader may sometimes be fascinated with the boldness and originality of his views; but the strongest impression which usually remains is, that the author's genius was better fitted to catch what he has himself called "the looser analogies which dress out the imagery of poetry," than to trace the "stricter ones which form the ratiocination of philosophy." If his fame be destined in any thing to outlive the fluctuating fashion of the day, it is on his merit as a poet that it is likely to rest; and his reveries in science have probably no other chance of being saved from oblivion, but by having been "married to immortal verse."

We have ventured already to express our opinion of the inferiority of the "Temple of Nature," in poetical excellence, to the "Botanic Garden." In the choice of this subject, it does not appear to us that he laboured under any comparative disadvantage. In many respects it approaches very closely to that of the poem of Lucretius; and in point of interest, as well as capability of varied description and embellishment, it possesses obvious advantages over the metaphorical adventures of the vegetable kingdom. There is, however, a disadvantage of another kind, which, in perusing the "Temple of Nature," it is impossible for a moment to lose sight of; it is unhappily posterior in date, and both its beauties and blemishes are of a kind which constantly remind us of those of the "Botanic Garden," and as constantly suggest the idea of perfect imitation. Although the tendency to repetition is by no means confined to the poetry of the volume, it is not to the poverty or decay of genius that we are disposed to impute this appearance of sameness; and we rather suspect that it is inseparably connected with the peculiar cast of Dr. Darwin's poetical manner. In the language of painters, Dr. Darwin is decidedly a mannerist; and *mannerism* is a quality which, to say the least of it, is easily exhaustible.

In analysing the peculiar characters of Dr. Darwin's poetry, we are fortunately assisted by the exposition he has given of his own poetical creed. In one of the critical "Interludes" of the "Botanic Garden," he has informed his "Bookseller," that, "next to the measure of the language, the principal distinction between poetry and prose appears to consist in this, that poetry admits of but few words expressive of very abstracted ideas, whereas prose abounds with them. And as our ideas derived from visible objects are more distinct than those derived from the objects of our own senses, the words expressive of these ideas belonging to vision make up the principal part of poetic language. Mr. Pope has written a bad verse in the Windsor Forest,

'And Kennet swift, for silver eels *renown'd*.'

The word 'renown'd' does not present the idea of a visible object to the mind, and is thence prosaic. But change this line thus,

'And Kennet swift, where silver graylings *play*,'

it becomes poetry, because the scenery is then brought before the eye."

In the hands of Dr. Darwin this theory has not remained an idle speculation; it appears to have had a powerful influence on the formation of his poetical habits, and may be regarded as the grand source of the beauties and defects which most strongly characterise the whole of his poetry. In all his delineations of external nature, his skill is directed to produce, not an *impressive* but a *picturesque* effect; every circumstance is selected, and every epithet is sought for, which may bring out the object *directly* to the eye; and the most glowing tints are thrown over the whole which the language of vision can supply. Where his subject does not in itself strictly belong to external and visible nature, but presents itself in a general or abstracted state, he scrupulously avoids ever showing it in its native metaphysical nakedness, and his imagination is instantly employed to embody it in a material and visible shape. Bold metaphors, personifications, and allegories, are his constant and sole resources; and in portraying the scenery of this fairy kingdom of his own creation, he adheres strictly to the principle of addressing himself directly and only to the eye. Nor does his propensity to metamorphosis stop here; but even in delineating inanimated external nature, her own graceful and varied forms seem too tame to catch his fancy, till they have been transformed into the living monsters of his own brain.

Few readers will deny that, in following out his own views of poetical writing, Dr. Darwin has displayed very splendid talents; yet we are inclined to think that his own practice affords the most ample illustration of the errors of his theory. Like most other theories, it contains a certain portion of truth without embracing the whole; and the little it contains is rendered mischievous by the exclusion of the remainder. Nobody will dispute that mere *picturesque* effect may often be extremely pleasing, independently of every other consideration; but it is surely a very unjust limitation of the natural range of poetry, to consider it as solely or ultimately employed in the production of such effects. Its general aim is to produce a strong and pleasing *impression*, through the medium of the fancy, or of the passions and feelings; and among the most efficacious of the *means* that are so employed, the delineation of visible forms may claim a very high, perhaps the highest rank. But it is equally certain, that in poetry very powerful impressions may be given by other means, which cannot be reduced within the narrow rules which Dr. Darwin has imposed upon himself in the exercise of the poetical art; and it appears to us, that, by the proscription of abstract and general language, he has cast away an important instrument in exciting and interesting the feelings of his reader. It is true, indeed, that, even in the representation and expression of the passions, a great deal may be borowed from the language of vision; but, after very liberal allowance, a great deal will be found to remain, which is either of a different origin, or which, in its progress, has ceased to be felt as the vehicle of picturesque imagery.

As the greater part of Dr. Darwin's poetry is properly descriptive, he has of course suffered the less from this limitation of the natural range of poetical composition, and from thus affecting always to present his ideas in a visible form. But there are other evils attending it, by which he appears to us to have been more essentially injured, and which may be considered as directly counteracting and weakening even those *picturesque effects* he is ever ambitious of producing. The outlines of his figures are often drawn with astonishing strength and accuracy; but, by employing only the language of vision, he has given them a certain hard-

ness and coldness of execution; and, by foregoing the use of that which is addressed to the feeling, rather than to the eye, he has neglected to avail himself of those fine and fleeting circumstances and associations which are beyond the reach of the pencil, but which, in poetical painting, may be made to contribute powerfully towards the general impression. In the following well-known lines of Pope, there is an artful and successful combination of the *picturesque* and the *impressive:* —

> " But o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,
> Long sounding aisles, and intermingled graves,
> Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws
> A deathlike silence, and a dread repose:
> Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,
> Shades every flow'r, and darkens every green;
> Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,
> And breathes a browner horror on the woods."

These lines have been happily imitated by Dr. Darwin in his own manner; that is, with a view solely to the picturesque effect of a single isolated figure. There is perhaps little doubt from which of the two a statuary would choose to copy; yet, we will venture to affirm, that in general and impressive effect, the following lines fall short of their original: —

> " O'er the green floor, and round the dew-damp wall,
> The slimy snail and bloated lizard crawl;
> While on white heaps of intermingled bones
> The muse of Melancholy sits and moans;
> Showers her cold tears o'er Beauty's early wreck,
> Spreads her pale arms, and bends her marble neck."
>
> Canto I. l. 119.

The limited system of Dr. Darwin is productive of additional and still more unsurmountable disadvantages in the delineation of those large and complicated groups which he labours so frequently to exhibit to the fancy of his reader. It seems impossible, merely by the language of vision, to give that due *keeping* or subordination of parts which is essential to true picturesque effect, and which on canvas is accomplished by those gradations of size and of colouring which the rules of perspective prescribe. The different parts are unavoidably presented, not in subordination, but in *succession;* and the effect would be nearly similar to that of an Indian screen, where all the figures are crowded into the foreground, without symmetry or arrangement, in the full glare of colouring and dignity of natural dimension. Of this evil Dr. Darwin seems not to have been aware; and certainly in his own practice the most ample illustrations of it are afforded. It impairs, and sometimes destroys, the effect of his most elaborate descriptions, and leaves on the mind little else than a confused, dazzling, and painful sensation. The evil is perhaps inseparable from the nature of the medium employed in poetical description; but at least it admits of palliation by the skilful intermixture of those more indirect modes of suggestion which address the fancy through the feelings; and by thus bringing forward directly into view the principal figure, while the subordinate parts of the composition are suffered to remain, as it were, in the indistinctness and dimness of distance.

The most partial admirers of Dr. Darwin's poetry will probably confess, that they experience a certain monotonous effect, which gradually fatigues and disgusts, and renders a continued perusal almost intolerable.

The circumstance is extremely mortifying; but it is plainly connected in part with the limited and mistaken notions of poetry which we have been considering. By addressing himself to the mind only through the medium of one of the external senses, the poet obviously deprives himself of vast resources for varying and diversifying the entertainment of his reader, and must be contented to ring the changes on ideas and words of a single class. But this monotony of manner is prodigiously increased by the use which it brings along with it of metaphor, personification, and allegory, the perpetual recurrence of which can be atoned for by no individual excellence. The utmost fertility of poetical invention is circumscribed within limited bounds; and when every object, whether of the material or ideal world, is transmuted into some fantastical shape of the poet's brain, we need not be surprised, in this creation of monsters, to find the prodigal variety and beauty of nature lost in the poverty and formality of art.

A remark, somewhat analogous, may perhaps be applied to the diction of Dr. Darwin's poetry. It often has the merit of great splendour and dignity; but it is always remote from simplicity, and too often in the opposite extreme of unnatural affectation. It aims at a uniform grandeur and stateliness of march; but is frequently sustained only by meretricious ornament and pedantic inversion. It is to this cause that may in part be imputed that monotonous and tiresome effect in the poetry of Dr. Darwin, for which we have endeavoured to account. The style, which admits of the richest variety, is unquestionably that of which the primary and leading character is simplicity. Without suffering degradation, it admits of every diversity of becoming ornament; but where ornament is itself the primary and leading character, it is apt to disdain the association either of simplicity or variety. In attempting to lower its tone, it usually becomes grovelling and ludicrous.— The following lines may perhaps afford an apt illustration: the unhappy mixture of prosiac flatness and of figurative bombast need not be particularly pointed out: —

> " Hear, O ye Sons of Time! your final doom,
> And read the characters that mark your tomb:
> The marble mountain, and the sparry steep,
> Were built by myriad nations of the deep,—
> Age after age, who form'd their spiral shells,
> Their sea-fan gardens and their coral cells:
> Till central fires with unextinguish'd sway
> Raised the primeval islands into day.—
> The sand-fill'd strata stretch'd from pole to pole;
> Unmeasured beds of clay, and marl, and coal,
> Black ore of manganese, the zinky stone,
> And dusky steel on his magnetic throne,
> In deep morass or eminence superb,
> Rose from the wrecks of animal or herb;
> These from their elements by Life combined,
> Form'd by digestion, and in glands refined,
> Gave, by their just excitement of the sense,
> The Bliss of Being to the vital Ens."
>
> Canto IV. l. 429.

The adoption and recurrence of a few favourite images and phrases may likewise contribute its influence to the painful uniformity of Dr. Darwin's manner; but it is only of subordinate importance. When future critics shall think fit to bestow their labour in detecting the sources of his imitations, they will be at no loss to discover the very liberal use he has

made of the ideas and phrases of former poets: yet it is fair to add, that in his plagiarism he has paid no greater respect to his own property than to that of his neighbours.

Among the peculiar characteristics of Dr. Darwin's poetry, and the causes of that monotonous feeling of which his readers complain, we have sometimes heard the system of his versification stated as the chief. In this, however, we cannot agree. It is in this point that we consider him as most invulnerable; and the musical cadences of his verses appear to us as beautiful and as various as their general nature admits of. We have not overlooked his partiality to the trochaic foot at the commencement of his lines, and to one or two favourite and prevailing subdivisions of his couplets: but, without stopping to justify him by the authority of his greatest predecessors, it may be enough to say, that their recurrence is rarely more frequent than to produce an agreeable variety. It is in the structure of his sentences, and in the selection of his thoughts, not in the measurement of syllables, that his characteristic blemishes are to be traced.

We are aware that, in our criticisms on the literary merits of Dr. Darwin, we have been chiefly occupied in the invidious task of censure. Our apology will readily suggest itself. We are not insensible of the force of his claims to the praise of genius and of various accomplishments; but his real deserts are not of a kind which lie hid from the general eye; while his blemishes are so intimately blended with his beauties, as often either to escape observation, or to attract injudicious applause. Perhaps few of his readers have, at all times, been on their guard against this dangerous fascination; and the mere caprice of fashion may have tended blindly to mislead a great many more. To have pointed out some of the characteristical faults of a writer who threatened at one time to establish a new sect in poetry, may not therefore be without its use. But though we would deprecate the adoption of his manner as a model for imitation, we should lament to see him robbed of his just portion of qualified praise; and we trust we shall be able often to recur with pleasure, certainly with pleasing recollections, to the "splendid page" of Dr. Darwin. *

* * * * * * * *

In one respect we feel ourselves compelled to dissent from an opinion entertained by most of the admirers of Dr. Darwin, and by none more firmly than Miss Seward. "One extraordinary and, in a poet of so much genius, unprecedented instance of plagiarism excepted," says Miss Seward, "not one great poet of England is more *original* than Darwin. His design, his ideas, his style, his manner, are wholly his own."

If it were asked, in what chiefly consists the originality of manner which is supposed to characterise the new Darwinian school of English poetry, it would probably be answered, in the *first* place, that the general design of clothing the philosophy of natural history in the gay attire and with all the higher graces of poetry, was novel, at least in any English poet; in the *second* place, that his picturesque style of poetical description, sus-

* To those who are fond of tracing resemblances in the thoughts and style of celebrated authors, the subjoined remarks, in reply to Miss Seward's praise of Dr. Darwin's *originality*, may be interesting. They are transcribed from a criticism on Miss Seward's Memoirs of Dr. Darwin, in No. vii. of the Edinburgh Review, p. 239., and seem to form an appropriate conclusion to the above estimate of Dr. Darwin's poetical genius. They are from the pen of the distinguished critic who reviewed Dr. Darwin's "Temple of Nature."

tained by bold personifications and metaphors addressed exclusively to the eye, is, in a great degree at least, his own; and, *lastly*, that, in the loftiness of his laboured and inverted diction, and in the stately march of his highly polished versification, there are peculiarities of manner which it may be difficult to describe, but which must at once be felt as distinguishing him widely from his great predecessors in English poetry.

It is not our intention to arraign Dr. Darwin of literary depredation on the property of others, of the felonious kind complained of so justly by Miss Seward; nor shall we venture dogmatically to assert that this peculiar manner to which he has bequeathed his name, was formed on a servile imitation of any existing model. It is true, notwithstanding, that, for nearly seventy years, there has existed, in obscurity and neglect, a philosophical poem in the English language, stamped incontrovertibly with all those peculiar characters of the *Darwinian school* to which we have alluded. It is that obscurity and neglect alone which could have exempted Dr. Darwin from the charge of having imitated an unsuccessful original; and although it may possibly be true that the poem in question was unknown to him, it will at least become necessary hereafter to date the origin of the *school* at an earlier period.

The poem was published * anonymously, in the year 1735; and of its author we have not obtained any information. It is entitled "Universal Beauty;" and its general object is an exposition of whatever is beautiful in the plan and economy of the universe in all its parts. In the prosecution of this object, the author takes a very wide compass; and the general laws which bind the planetary system, the physical laws which peculiarly regulate the globe which we inhabit, the phenomena and provisions of the mineral, the vegetable, and the animal kingdoms, are all brought under poetical review; and the more remote and fanciful allusions of the text are illustrated by a series of philosophical notes. That the resemblance does not stop here, but extends still more strikingly to the other characteristic peculiarities of "the Darwinian manner," may be most effectually illustrated by a few extracts, taken at random.

In the third part, which contains a "survey of vegetable nature," after tracing the analogy of animal and vegetable life, we have the following lines, in illustration of "the various provisions of nature, for protecting and supporting the indigent, as the strawberry, cinquefoil, &c.; and supporting the feeble, as the vine, bryony, ivy, &c.; and thus equally propagating and spreading a universality of delights, pleasures, and enjoyments."

"Thus mantling snug beneath a verdant veil,
The creepers draw their horizontal trail;
Wide o'er the bank, the plantal reptile bends,
Adown its stem the rooty fringe depends:
The feeble boughs with anch'ring safety binds,
Nor leaves precarious to insulting winds;
The tendrils next of slender helpless size,
Ascendant through luxurious pamp'ring rise;
Kind nature soothes their innocence of pride,
While buoy'd aloft the flow'ring wantons ride,
With fond adhesion round the cedar cling,
And wreathing, circulate their am'rous ring,
Sublime, with winding maturation grow,
And, clench'd, retentive gripe the topmost bough;

* "Universal Beauty, a Poem." London: J. Wilcox. 1735. Folio. It consists of six parts, published successively, containing each above 400 lines.

Here climb direct, the ministerial rock,
And clasping firm, its steepy fragments lock;
Or various, with agglutinating guile,
Cement tenacious to some neighb'ring pile;
Investing green, some fabric here ascend,
And clust'ring, o'er its pinnacles depend."

Part III. l. 271—290.

In allusion to those plants which are supposed to obey the influence of the sun and moon, we find the following lines: —

" Here winding to the Sun's magnetic ray,
The solar plants adore the Lord of Day;
With Persian rites idolatrous incline,
And worship towards his consecrated shrine;
By south, from east to west, obsequious turn,
And moved with sympathetic ardours burn.
To these adverse, the Lunar sects dissent,
With convolution of opposed bent:
From west to east by equal influence tend,
And tow'rds the Moon's attractive crescenee bend;
There nightly worship with Sidonian zeal,
And Queen of Heaven, Astarte's idol hail."

Part III. l. 313—324.

We regret that our limits do not admit of the author's description (Part IV. l. 120—204.) of the circulation of the blood in animals, illustrated by a picturesque analogy to the motions of the fluid parts of the globe. The following lines, taken from Part V., refer to that species of insects which, like the beetle, " by a surprising machinery of little springs and hinges, erect the smooth covering of their backs, and, unfolding their wings that were most neatly disposed within their cases, prepare for flight."

" Or who a twofold apparatus share,
Natives of earth, and habitants of air,
Like warriors stride, oppress'd with shining mail,
But furl'd beneath, their silken pennons veil.
Deceived our fellow reptile we admire
His bright endorsement and compact attire,
When lo! the latent springs of motion play,
And rising lids disclose the rich inlay;
The tissued wing its folded membrane frees,
And with blithe quavers fans the gathering breeze;
Elate tow'rds heav'n the beauteous wonder flies,
And leaves the mortal wrapt in deep surprise.

" So when the guide led Tobit's youthful heir,
Elect, to win the sev'n times widow'd fair,
The angelic form, conceal'd in human guise,
Deceived the search of his associate's eyes;
Till swift each charm bursts forth like issuing flame,
And circling rays confess his heavenly frame;
The zodiac round his waste divinely turns,
And waving radiance o'er his plumage burns;
In awful transports wrapt, the youth admires,
While light from earth the dazzling shape aspires."

Part V. l. 127—148.

We cannot refrain from giving a part of this writer's description of the creation of those planetary systems of which the universe is composed. It is a favourite topic with both poets.

" Swift roll'd the spheres to their appointed place,
Jocund through heaven to run the various race;
Orb within orb in living circlets turn,
And central suns through every system burn;
Revolving planets on their gods attend,
And towards each sun with awful reverence bend;
Still towards the loved enlivening beam they wheel,
And pant, and tremble, like the amorous steel.
They spring, they revel in the blaze of day,
Bathe in the golden stream, and drink the orient ray;
Their blithe satellites with lively glance
(Celestial equipage) around them dance;
All, distance due, and beauteous order keep,
And spinning soft, upon their centres sleep."

Part I. l. 91—104.

Similar passages might easily be accumulated; but these may serve as a specimen of the peculiar manner of this forgotten poet. Of its resemblance to that of Dr. Darwin, we shall leave our readers to judge. That there are obvious shades of difference, we have no hesitation to admit; nor do we call in question the decided superiority of the latter. The poem of " Universal Beauty " is indeed extremely unequal: passages occur which are worthy of Sir Richard Blackmore; and in others there may be discovered an unsuccessful effort to imitate the fashionable antithetic manner of Pope. Whether or not the poetry of Darwin would, in the age of Pope, have incurred the same hazard of neglect with that of the writer whom we have ventured to exhibit as his prototype, we shall not presume to conjecture.

ALFIERI.*

Pride and enthusiasm — irrepressible vehemence and ambition — and an arrogant, fastidious, and somewhat narrow system of taste and opinions, were the great leading features in the mind of Alfieri. Strengthened, and in some degree produced, by a loose and injudicious education, those traits were still further developed by the premature and protracted indulgences of a very dissipated youth; and when, at last, they admitted of an application to study, imparted their own character of impetuosity to those more meritorious exertions; — converted a taste into a passion; and left him, for a great part of his life, under the influence of a true and irresistible inspiration. Every thing in him, indeed, appears to have been passion and ungoverned impulse; and, while he was raised above the common level of his degenerate countrymen by a stern and self-willed haughtiness, that would have better become an ancient Roman, he was chiefly distinguished from other erect spirits by the vehemence which formed the basis of his character, and by the uncontrolled dominion which he allowed to his various and successive propensities. So constantly and entirely, indeed, was he under the influence of these domineering attachments, that his whole life and character might be summed up by describing him as the victim of a passion for horses — a passion for travelling —

* Memoirs of Alfieri, written by Himself.—Vol. xv. p. 299. January, 1810.

a passion for literature — and a passion for what he called independence.

The memoirs of such a life, and the confessions of such a man, seem to hold out a promise of no common interest and amusement. Yet though they are here presented to us with considerable fulness and apparent fidelity, we cannot say that we have been much amused or interested by the perusal. There is a proud coldness in the narrative, which neither invites sympathy nor flatters the imagination. The author seems to disdain giving himself *en spectacle* to his readers; and chronicles his various acts of extravagance and fits of passion with a sober and languid gravity, to which we can recollect no parallel. In this review of the events and feelings of a life of adventure and agitation, he is never once betrayed into the language of emotion; but dwells on the scenes of his childhood without tenderness, and on the struggles and tumults of his riper years without any sort of animation. We look in vain through the whole narrative for one gleam of that magical eloquence by which Rousseau transports us into the scences he describes, and into the heart which responded to these scenes, — or even for a trait of that sociable garrulity which has enabled Marmontel and Cumberland to give a grace to obsolete anecdote, and to people the whole space around them with living pictures of the beings among whom they existed. There is not one character attempted from beginning to end of this biography; — which is neither lively, in short, nor eloquent — neither playful, impassioned, nor sarcastic. Neither is it a mere unassuming outline of the author's history and publications, like the short notices of Hume or Smith. It is, on the contrary, a pretty copious and minute narrative of all his feelings and adventures; and contains, as we should suppose, a tolerably accurate enumeration of his migrations, prejudices, and antipathies. It is not that he does not condescend to talk about trifling things, but that he will not talk about them in a lively or interesting manner; and systematically declines investing any part of his statement with those picturesque details, and that warm colouring, by which alone the story of an individual can often excite much interest among strangers. Though we have not been able to see the original of these Memoirs, we will venture to add, that they are by no means well written; and that they will form no exception to the general observation, that almost all Italian prose is feeble and deficient in precision. There is something, indeed, quite remarkable in the wordiness of most of the modern writers in this language, — the very copiousness and smoothness of which seems to form an apology for the want of force or exactness — and to hide, with its sweet and uniform flow, both from the writer and the reader, that penury of thought and looseness of reasoning which are so easily detected when it is rendered into a harsher dialect. Unsatisfactory, however, as they are in many particulars, it is still impossible to peruse the memoirs of such a man as Alfieri without some interest and gratification. The traits of ardour and originality that are disclosed through all the reserve and gravity of the style, beget a continual expectation and curiosity; and even those parts of his story which seem to belong rather to his youth, rank, and education, than to his genius or peculiar character, acquire a degree of importance, from considering how far these very circumstances may have assisted the formation, and obstructed the developement, of that character and genius; and in what respects its peculiarities may be referred to the obstacles it had to encounter, in misguidance, passion, and prejudice. Many of the peculiarities of Alfieri may be safely referred to the accident of his birth,

and the errors of his education. His *ennui*, arrogance, and dissipation, are not very unlike those of many spoiled youths of condition; nor is there any thing very extraordinary in his subsequent application to study, or the turn of his first political opinions. The peculiar nature of his pursuits, and the character of his literary productions, afford more curious matter for speculation.

In reflecting on the peculiar misery which Alfieri and some other eminent persons are recorded to have endured, while their minds were withheld from any worthy occupation, we have sometimes been tempted to conclude, that to suffer deeply from *ennui* is an indication of superior intellect; and that it is only to minds destined for higher attainments that the want of an object is a source of real affliction. Upon a little reflection, however, we are disposed to doubt of the soundness of this opinion; and really cannot permit all the shallow coxcombs who languish under the burden of existence to take themselves, on our authority, for spell-bound geniuses. The most powerful stream, indeed, will stagnate the most deeply, and will burst out to more wild devastation, when obstructed in its peaceful course: but the weakly current is, upon the whole, most liable to obstruction; and will mantle and rot at least as dismally as its betters. The innumerable blockheads, in short, who betake themselves to suicide, dram-drinking, or dozing in dirty nightcaps, will not allow us to suppose that there is any real connection between *ennui* and talent; or that fellows who are fit for nothing but mending shoes may not be very miserable if they are unfortunately raised above their proper occupation.

If it does frequently happen that extraordinary and vigorous exertions are found to follow this heavy slumber of the faculties, the phenomenon, we think, may be explained without giving any countenance to the supposition, that vigorous faculties are most liable to such an obscuration. In the first place, the relief and delight of exertion must act with more than usual force upon a mind which has suffered from the want of it; and will be apt to be pushed farther than in cases where the exertion has been more regular. The chief cause, however, of the signal success which has sometimes attended those who have been rescued from *ennui*, we really believe to be their ignorance of the difficulties they have to encounter, and that inexperience which makes them venture on undertakings which more prudent calculators would decline. We have already noticed, more than once *, the effect of early study and familiarity with the best models in repressing emulation by despair; and have endeavoured, upon this principle, to explain why so many original authors have been in a great degree without education. Now, a youth spent in lassitude and dissipation leads necessarily to a manhood of ignorance and inexperience; and has all the advantages, as well as the inconveniences, of such a situation. If any feeling of strength, ambition, or other extraordinary impulse, therefore, prompt such a person to attempt any thing arduous, it is likely that he will go about it with all that rash and vehement courage which results from unconsciousness of the obstacles that are to be overcome; and it is needless to say how often success is ensured by this confident and fortunate audacity. Thus, Alfieri, in the outset of his literary career, ran his head against dramatic poetry, almost before he knew what was meant either by poetry or the drama; and dashed out a tragedy while but imperfectly acquainted with the language in which

* Vol. viii. p. 329. Vol. xiii. p. 250.

he was writing, and utterly ignorant either of the rules that had been delivered, or the models which had been created by the genius of his great predecessors. Had he been trained up from his early youth in fearful veneration for these rules and these models, it is certain that he would have resisted the impulse which led him to place himself, with so little preparation, within their danger; and most probable that he would never have thought himself qualified to answer the test they required of him. In giving way, however, to this propensity, with all the thoughtless freedom and vehemence which had characterised his other indulgences, he found himself suddenly embarked in an unexpected undertaking, and in sight of unexpected distinction. The success he had obtained with so little knowledge of the subject, tempted him to acquire what was wanting to deserve it, and justified hopes and stimulated exertions which earlier reflection would, in all probability, have for ever prevented.

The *morality* of Alfieri seems to have been at least as relaxed as that of the degenerate nobles whom in all other things he professed to reprobate and despise. He confesses, without the slightest appearance of contrition, that his general intercourse with women was profligate in the extreme; and has detailed the particulars of three several intrigues with married women, without once appearing to imagine that they could require any apology or expiation. On the contrary, while recording the deplorable consequences of one of them, he observes, with great composure, that it was distressing to him to contemplate a degradation, of which he had, "though innocently," been the occasion. The general arrogance of his manners, too, and the occasional brutality of his conduct towards his inferiors, are far from giving us an amiable impression of his general character; nor have we been able to find, in the whole of these confessions, a single trait of kindness of heart, or generous philanthropy, to place in the balance against so many indications of selfishness and violence. There are proofs enough, indeed, of a firm, elevated, and manly spirit; but small appearance of any thing gentle, or even, in a moral sense, of any thing very respectable. In his admiration, in short, of the worthies of antiquity, he appears to have copied their harshness and indelicacy at least as faithfully as their loftiness of character; and, at the same time, to have combined with it all the licentiousness and presumption of a modern Italian noble.

We have been somewhat perplexed with his politics. After speaking, as we have seen, of the mild government of the kings of Sardinia,—after adding, that, "when he had read Plutarch and visited England, he felt the most unsurmountable repugnance at marrying or having his children born at Turin," — after recording, that a monarch is a master, and a subject a slave, — and "that he shed tears of mingled grief and rage at having been born in such a state as Piedmont;" — after all this — after giving up his estates to escape from this bondage, and after writing his books on the Tiranide, and his odes on American liberty, — we really were prepared to find him taking the popular side, at the outset, at least, of the French revolution, and exulting in the downfall of one of those hateful despotisms, against the whole system of which he had previously inveighed with no extraordinary moderation. Instead of this, however, we find him abusing the revolutionists, and extolling their opponents, with all the zeal of a professed antijacobin, — writing an eulogium on the dethroned monarch like Mr. Pybus, and an Antigallican like Peter Porcupine. Now, we are certainly very far from saying, that a true friend

of liberty might not execrate the proceedings of the French revolutionists; but a professed hater of royalty might have felt more indulgence for the new republic; and such a crazy zealot for liberty as Alfieri showed himself in Italy, both by his writings and his conduct, might well have been carried away by that promise of emancipation to France, which deluded sounder heads than his in all the countries of Europe. — There are two keys, we think, in the work before us, to this apparent inconsistency. Alfieri, with all his abhorrence of tyrants, was, in his heart, a great lover of aristocracy; and he had a great spite and antipathy at the French nation, collectively and individually.

Though professedly a republican, it is easy to see that the republic he wanted was one on the Roman model, — where there were patricians as well as plebeians, and where a man of great talents had even a good chance of being one day appointed dictator. He did not admire kings, indeed, — because he did not happen to be born one, and because they were the only beings to whom he was born inferior; but he had the utmost veneration for nobles, — because fortune had placed him in that order, and because the power and distinction which belonged to it were agreeable to him, and, he thought, would be exercised for the good of his inferiors. When he heard that Voltaire had written a tragedy on the story of Brutus, he fell into a great passion, and exclaimed, that the subject was too lofty for "a French plebeian, who, during twenty years, had subscribed himself Gentleman in ordinary to the King!"

This love of aristocracy, however, will not explain the defence of monarchy and the abuse of republics, which formed the substance of his Antigallican. But the truth is, that he was antigallican from his youth up; and would never have forgiven that nation, if they had succeeded in establishing a free government, — especially while Italy was in bondage. The contempt which Voltaire had expressed for Italian literature, and the general degradation into which the national character had fallen, had sunk deep into his fierce and haughty spirit, and inspired him with an antipathy towards that people by whom his own countrymen had been subdued, ridiculed, and outshone. This paltry and vindictive feeling leads him, throughout this whole work, to speak of them in the most unjust and uncandid terms. There may be some truth in his remarks on the mean and meagre articulation of their language, and on their "horrible *u*, with their little lips drawn in to pronounce it, as if they were blowing hot soup." Nay, we could even excuse the nationality which leads him to declare, that "he would rather be the author of ten good Italian verses, than of volumes written in *English* or *French*, or any such harsh and unharmonious jargon, — though their cannon and their armies should continue to render these languages fashionable." But we cannot believe in the sincerity of an amorous Italian who declares that he never could get through the first volume of Rousseau's Heloïse; or of a modern author of regular dramas who professes to see nothing at all admirable in the tragedies of Racine or Voltaire. It is evident to us that he grudged these great writers the glory that was due to them, out of the vindictive feeling of national resentment; and that, for the same reason, he grudged the French nation the freedom, in which he would otherwise have been among the first to believe and to exult.

It only remains to say a word or two of the literary productions of this extraordinary person; — a theme, however interesting and attractive, upon which we can scarcely pretend to enter on the present occasion.

We have not yet been able to procure a complete copy of the works of Alfieri; and, even of those which have been lately transmitted to us, we will confess that a considerable portion remains to be perused. We have seen enough, however, to satisfy us that they are deserving of a careful analysis, and that a free and enlightened estimate of their merit may be rendered both interesting and instructive to the greater part of our readers. We hope soon to be in a condition to attempt this task; and shall, in the mean time, confine ourselves to a very few observations suggested by the style and character of the tragedies with which we have been for some time acquainted.

These pieces approach much nearer to the ancient Grecian model than any other modern production with which we are acquainted, in the simplicity of the plot, the fewness of the persons, the directness of the action, and the uniformity and elaborate gravity of the composition. Infinitely less declamatory than the French tragedies, they have less brilliancy and variety, and a deeper tone of dignity and nature. As they have not adopted the choral songs of the Greek stage, however, they are, on the whole, less poetical than those ancient compositions; although they are worked throughout with a fine and careful hand, and diligently purified from every thing ignoble or feeble in the expression. The author's anxiety to keep clear of figures of mere ostentation, and to exclude all showpieces of fine writing in a dialogue of deep interest or impetuous passion, has betrayed him, on some occasions, into too sententious and strained a diction, and given an air of labour and heaviness to many parts of his composition. He has felt, perhaps a little too constantly, that the cardinal virtue of a dramatic writer is to keep his personages to the business and the concerns that lie before them; and by no means to let them turn to moral philosophers, or rhetorical describers of their own emotions. But, in his zealous adherence to this good maxim, he seems sometimes to have forgotten, that certain passions are declamatory in nature as well as on the stage; and that, at any rate, they do not all vent themselves in concise and pithy sayings, but run occasionally into hyperbole and amplification. As it is the great excellence, so it is occasionally the chief fault, of Alfieri's dialogue, that every word is honestly employed to help forward the action of the play, in serious argument, necessary narrative, or the direct expression of natural emotion. There are no excursions or digressions, — no episodical conversations, — and none but the most brief moralisings. This gives a certain air of solidity to the whole structure of the piece, that is apt to prove oppressive to an ordinary reader, and reduces the entire drama to too great uniformity.

We make these remarks chiefly with a reference to French tragedy. For our own part, we believe that those who are duly sensible of the merit of Shakspeare will never be much struck with any other dramatical composition. There are no other plays, indeed, that paint human nature, — that strike off the characters of men with all the freshness and sharpness of the original, — and speak the language of all the passions, not like a mimic, but an echo — neither softer nor louder, nor differently modulated from the spontaneous utterance of the heart. In these respects he disdains all comparison with Alfieri, or with any other mortal; nor is it fair, perhaps, to suggest a comparison, where no rivalry can be imagined. Alfieri, like all the Continental dramatists, considers a tragedy as a poem. In England, we look upon it rather as a representation of character and passion. With them, of course, the style and diction, and the congruity

and proportions of the piece, are the main objects: with us, the truth and the force of the imitation. It is sufficient for them, if there be character and action enough to prevent the composition from languishing, and to give spirit and propriety to the polished dialogue of which it consists: we are satisfied, if there be management enough in the story not to shock credibility entirely, and beauty and polish enough in the diction to exclude disgust or derision. In his own way, Alfieri, we think, is excellent. His fables are all admirably contrived and completely developed; his dialogue is copious and progressive; and his characters all deliver natural sentiments with great beauty, and often with great force of expression. In our eyes, however, *it is* a fault that the fable is too simple, and the incidents too scanty; and that all the characters express themselves with equal felicity, and urge their opposite views and pretensons with equal skill and plausibility. We see at once that an ingenious author has versified the sum of a dialogue; and never for a moment imagine that we hear the real persons contending. There may be more eloquence and dignity in this style of dramatising;—there is infinitely more deception in ours.

With regard to the diction of these pieces, it is not for *tramontane* critics to presume to offer any opinion. They arè considered in Italy, we believe, as the purest specimens of the *favella Toscana* that late ages have produced. To us they certainly seem to want something of that flow and sweetness to which we have been accustomed in Italian poetry, and to be formed rather upon the model of Dante than of Petrarca. At all events, it is obvious that the style is highly elaborate and artificial; and that the author is constantly striving to give it a sort of factitious force and energy, by the use of condensed and emphatic expressions, interrogatories, antitheses, and short and inverted sentences. In all these respects, as well as in the chastised gravity of the sentiments, and the temperance and propriety of all the delineations of passion, these pieces are exactly the reverse of what we should have expected from the fiery, fickle, and impatient character of the author. From all that Alfieri has told us of himself, we should have expected to find in his plays great vehemence and irregular eloquence—sublime and extravagant sentiments —passions rising to frenzy—and poetry swelling into bombast. Instead of this, we have a subdued and concise representation of energetic discourses—passions, not loud but deep—and a style so severely correct and scrupulously pure, as to indicate, even to unskilful eyes, the great labour which must have been bestowed on its purification. No characters can be more different than that which we should infer from reading the tragedies of Alfieri, and that which he has assigned to himself in these authentic memoirs.

MISS BAILLIE.*

It is now, we think, something more than nine years† since we first ventured to express our opinion of Miss Baillie's earlier productions; and to raise our warning voice against those narrow and peculiar views of dramatic excellence, by which it appeared to us that she had imprudently increased the difficulties of a very difficult undertaking. Notwithstanding this admonition, Miss Baillie has gone on (as we expected) in her own way; and has become (as we expected) both less popular and less deserving of popularity in every successive publication. The volume before us, we are afraid, is decidedly inferior to any of her former volumes; (for we have too much forbearance, or nationality, to say any thing of her single play;) at the same time that it contains indications of talent that ought not to be overlooked, and specimens of excellence which make it a duty to examine into the causes of its general failure.

We have formerly said almost enough, we believe, of her extraordinary determination to write a tragedy and a comedy upon each of the stronger passions of the mind;—a scheme so singularly perverse and fantastic, that we rather wonder at its having escaped the patronage of the learned professors in the academy of Lagoda; and in favour of which it would not be easy to say any thing—but that, by good luck, it is utterly impracticable. For, even passing over the captivating originality of comedies on Hatred and Revenge, and tragedies on Hope and Joy, it seems plain enough, that the interest of a play can no more be maintained by the delineation of one passion, than its dialogue and action can be supported by the exertions of one character. It is of the very essence of dramatic composition, to exhibit the play and contention of many and of opposite affections, not only in the different persons it represents, but in the single bosom of its hero; and its chief beauty and excellence consist in the variety of the forms and colours that thus move over its living scenes—in the harmonies and contrasts of the emotions which it successively displays—and in the very multitude and diversity of the impressions to which it gives birth. To substitute, for this, even the most careful and masterly delineation of any one emotion, would not only be to substitute something that was not dramatic for that which is the essence and the excellence of the drama, but to replace this excellence by something most conspicuously inferior—to set before us the studied postures and ostentatious anatomy of one unchanging academy figure, instead of the free action and complicated exertions of groups engaged in athletic contention,—or rather, to turn our eyes from the innumerable shades of expression that animate the greater compositions of Raphael or the Caracci, to rivet them on the fantastic and exaggerated features of *one* of the Passions of Le Brun.

If it be not this, however, that Miss Baillie aims at, then we must say that we cannot discover that there is any thing in the least degree peculiar or original in her system. The chief persons in every play must be actuated by certain passions; and by their influence the catastrophe must necessarily be brought about. In this sense, therefore, every play is a play on the passions, as much as any of those in the series before us;

* A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger Passions of the Mind. By Joanna Baillie.—Vol. xix. p. 216. February, 1812.

† Vol. ii. p. 269. The article to which reference is here made, will be found in this work, amongst the Miscellaneous Essays on Poetry and the Drama.

and all dramatic writers have proceeded upon the very system for which Miss Baillie here claims the honours of a discovery. It depends, indeed, entirely on the degree of simplicity in the plot, and of unity in the action, as well as on the number of the persons represented, whether the ruling passion of the principal characters shall be brought very conspicuously forward or not. Shakspeare, we believe, will be readily acquitted of the petty larceny of stealing Miss Baillie's system of dramatising the passions: and yet the Ambition of Macbeth, the Jealousy of Othello, and the Melancholy of Hamlet, contribute much more exclusively to the interest of those plays, than any of the passions represented by the writer before us can be said to do to the interest of the pieces she has produced as the first-fruits of that system. It may not be so easy, indeed, to specify the affections that are exhibited in many of the other plays of our great dramatist — in the Tempest, for example — in King Lear — in Julius Cæsar — in Cymbeline, or in Henry IV.; because the plot in all these pieces is more complicated, and the interest more divided. But there seems to be no reasonable ground for doubting that they were composed upon the very same system with the others; and that the interest which they excite depends upon the same general principles. The truth is, however, that common sense and vulgar possibility always appear tame and inglorious when compared with the splendid pretensions of theorists; and if Miss Baillie meant merely to announce, that she proposed to write plays that should be more like Macbeth and Othello than Cymbeline or the Tempest, the project must be allowed to be both innocent and laudable; and no blame can attach to her, except for the faults of the execution. In considering what are the chief of those faults, we are afraid, however, that it will be found that her system has had a worse effect than that of merely narrowing the field of her exertions.

There are two sorts of dramatic composition, or at least of tragedy, known in this country: — one, the old classical tragedy of the Grecian stage, modernised according to the French or Continental model; the other, the bold, free, irregular and miscellaneous drama of our own older writers, — or, to speak it more shortly and intelligibly, of Shakspeare. Miss Baillie, it appears to us, has attempted to unite the excellencies of both of these styles; — and has produced a combination of their defects.

The old Greek tragedy consisted of the representation of some one great, simple, and touching event, brought about by the agency of a very few persons, and detailed in grave, stately, and measured language, interspersed with choral songs and movements to music. In this primitive form of the drama, the story was commonly unfolded by means of a good deal of plain statement, direct enquiry, and detailed narration; — while the business was helped forward by means of short and pointed, though frequently very simple and obvious, argumentation, — and the interest maintained by pathetic exclamations, and reflections apparently artless and unostentatious. Such, we conceive, was the character of the ancient drama; upon the foundation of which, the French or Continental school appears obviously to have been built. The chief variations (besides the extinction of the Chorus) seem to be, first, that love has been made to supplant almost all the other passions, — and the tone, accordingly, has become less solemn and severe; secondly, that there is less simple narrative and enquiry, a great deal more argument or debate — every considerable scene, in fact, being now required to contain a complete and elaborate discussion, to which all the parties must come fully prepared to maintain their respective theses; and, thirdly, that the topics are drawn, in general,

from more extended and philosophical views of human nature; and the state of the feelings set forth with more rhetorical amplification, and with a more anxious and copious minuteness. Notwithstanding those very important distinctions, however, we think ourselves justified in arranging the tragic drama of ancient Greece and that of the continent of modern Europe as productions of the same school; because they will be found to agree in their main and characteristic attributes; because they both require the style and tone to be uniformly grave, lofty, and elaborate—the fable to be simple and direct—and the subject represented, to be weighty and important. Neither of them, consequently, admits of those minute touches of character, which give life and individuality to such delineations; and the interest, in both, rests either on the greatness of the action, and the general propriety and congruity of the sentiments by which it is accompanied—or on the beauty and completeness of the discussion—the poetical graces, the purity and elevation, of the language—and the accumulation of bright thoughts and happy expressions which are brought to bear upon the same subject.

Such, we believe, is the idea of dramatic excellence that prevails over the continent of Europe, and such the chief elements which are there admitted to compose it. In this country, however, we are fortunate enough to have a drama of a different description—a drama which aims at a far more exact imitation of nature, and admits of an appeal to a far greater variety of emotions—which requires less dignity or grandeur in its incidents, but deals them out with infinitely greater complication and profusion—which peoples its busy scenes with innumerable characters, and varies its style as freely as it multiplies its persons—which frequently remits the main action, and never exhausts any matter of controversy or discussion—indulges in flights of poetry too lofty for sober interlocutors, and sinks into occasional familiarities too homely for lofty representation—but, still pursuing nature and truth of character and of passion, is perpetually setting before us the express image of individuals whose reality it seems impossible to question, and the thrilling echo of emotions in which we are compelled to sympathise. In illustration of this style, it would be mere pedantry to refer to any other name than that of Shakspeare; who has undoubtedly furnished the most perfect as well as the most popular examples of its excellence; and who will be found to owe much of his unrivalled power over the attention, the imagination, and the feelings of his readers, to the rich variety of his incidents and images, and to the inimitable truth and minuteness of his crowded characters.

Nothing, then, it appears, can be more radically different than the modern French and the old English tragedy. The one is the offspring of genius and original observation—the other of judgment and skill. The one aims at pleasing, chiefly by a faithful representation of nature, and character, and passion—the other by a display of poetical and elaborate beauties. The style of the latter, therefore, requires a continual elevation, and its characters a certain dignified uniformity, which are necessarily rejected by the former;—while our old English drama derives no small share of its interest from the rapidity and profusion of the incidents and the multitude of the persons and images which it brings before the fancy;—all which are excluded from the more solemn and artificial stage of our Continental neighbours.

To endeavour to effect a combination of two styles so radically different, must be allowed to have been rather a bold undertaking; but it appears to us to be no less certain that Miss Baillie has made the attempt,

than that she has failed in it. What her object or intention was, indeed, we do not presume to conjecture: but the fact, we think, is undeniable, that she has united the familiar and irregular tone of our old drama, with the simple plot, and the scanty allowance of incident, that are characteristic of the Continental stage; and has given us the homely style and trifling adventures of the one school, without its copiousness and variety — and the languor and uniformity of the other, without its elevation, dignity, or polish. The events with which she is occupied, in short, are neither great nor many; and the style in which they are represented neither natural nor majestic. We do not think it uncharitable to say that this is a combination of defects only. The simple plot, the barrenness of incident, and the slowness of developement, which characterise the French drama, would evidently be insufferably heavy, if it were not redeemed by the greatness of the few events which it embraces, and by the uniform nobleness of the style, the weight and condensation of the sentiments, and the grace and elegance of the versification: while, on the other hand, the trifling incidents, the slovenly language, the vulgar characters, and the violent and incongruous images, which abound in our best home-made tragedies, would be still more intolerable, perhaps, to a correct taste, if ample compensation were not made by the richness and variety produced by this very abundance — by the lively and rapid succession of incidents — by the exquisite truth of the touches of character and passion, and the inimitable beauty of the occasional flights of poetry, that are so capriciously and often so unseasonably introduced. It was reserved for a writer of no ordinary talents to give us what was objectionable in each of these styles, without the compensations which naturally belonged to either; — and Miss Baillie, we think, has set the example of plays as poor in incident and character, and as sluggish in their pace, as any that languish on the Continental stage, without their grandeur, their elegance, or their interest; and at the same time as low and as irregular in their diction as our own early tragedies, — and certainly without their spirit, grace, or animation.

This, then, we think, is the chief defect in the plays of Miss Baillie; — and there are none of her readers, we believe, who have not been struck with the want of business in her scenes, and the extreme flatness and heaviness of all the subordinate parts of her performances. The events by which her story is developed are usually of a low and ordinary sort, and follow each other in a tame, slow, and awkward succession; while there is nothing either of richness, lightness, or vivacity in the general style, to conceal this penury in the more substantial elements of the composition. We travel through most of her performances, in short, with the same sort of feeling with which we travel through the dull stages of our own central highlands, — the feeling of getting on very slowly through scenes of uniform sterility — an impression which cannot be effaced by peeps of occasional sublimity, or reflections on the virtues of those who are said to delight in them.

This leading fault, we suppose, will be admitted by most even of Miss Baillie's admirers; but we do not reckon so securely on their acquiescence, when we add, that it appears to us that she has failed almost as signally in her delineation of character, as in the conception and conduct of her fable. The truth is, however, that she seems to us to want almost entirely the power of investing her characters with that air of individual reality, without which no very lively sympathy can ever be excited in the fortunes of the persons of the drama. She attempts to copy Shak-

speare, indeed, in making her characters disclose themselves by slight incidental occurrences, and casual bursts of temper, in matters unconnected with the main story; but there is no spirit of originality either in the outline or in the touches by which it is thus sought to be animated; and the traits that are lent to it in this style of high pretension, are borrowed, for the most part, from the most obvious and commonplace accompaniments of their leading qualities: and though there was some merit, as well as some boldness, in following Shakspeare so very closely, as to send her ambitious usurper, after the example of his Macbeth, to consult with witches in a cavern, we think it was any thing but ingenious or original to make a bloody tyrant swear outrageously at his servant for having mislaid his armour; or to intimate to us the playful and kindly nature of a distressed damsel, by letting us know, in heavy blank verse, that she had stopped in the lobby to pat the head of a hound that came fawning to be caressed by her. The great fault, however, of all her characters is, that they are evidently mere generalisations of a few obvious and familiar attributes — mere theoretical personages, compounded systematically out of a certain assemblage of qualities supposed to be striking or dramatic, without giving us the impression of there being any actual individual to whom they belong, and whose existence might be conceived as distinct from those qualities. This magical art, indeed, seems to have been possessed in its highest perfection by Shakspeare alone; who, when he had once conjured up, from the vasty depths of his own boundless imagination, such potent spirits as Hotspur or Hamlet, Mercutio or Falstaff, appears to have been actually haunted by their ideal presence, and so fully impressed with a sense of their reality, as not only to have seen without effort all that such persons could do or say in the business which they had been called up to perform, but actually to have been unable to confine them to that business, or to restrain them from following out their characteristic impulses into all kinds of accidental and capricious excesses. Miss Baillie, however, is in no danger of being thus overmastered by the phantoms of her own creation; who are so far from appearing to have a being independent of her control, or an activity which she cannot repress, that it is with difficulty that they get through the work which is set before them, or that the reader can conceive of them as any thing else than the limited and necessary causes of the phenomena which they produce.

This, however, is a fault by no means peculiar to Miss Baillie; and one of which we should scarcely have thought ourselves bound to take any notice, if she had not insisted so largely upon the necessity of attending to the delineation of character, and brought forward the traits of her own in a way so obtrusive, as to show very plainly that she thought her pretensions in this department proof against any sort of scrutiny. For the same reason, we think it our duty to say, further, that besides this want of the talent of giving individuality to her scenic personages, it appears to us that she is really disqualified from representing the higher characters of the tragic drama, by an obvious want of sympathy or admiration for such characters. Every reader of plays, and indeed of poetry, or works of imgination in general, must have observed, that there were certain characters, or qualities of mind, which were favourites with each particular author, and in the delineation of which he was consequently peculiarly spirited and successful. Even the universal Shakspeare, to whom the observation is infinitely less applicable than to any other mortal, obviously luxuriates most in his representation of original

humour and comic eccentricity. Otway has a decided predilection for scenes of tenderness and pathos — Beaumont and Fletcher for romantic extravagance of love or bravery — Milton for austere and lofty morality — and Dryden for pomp and magnificence. Each of these authors has, accordingly, succeeded eminently only in those characters to which they were most partial; — and scarcely any of them (except the first) has produced any striking delineation of an opposite character. Now, Miss Baillie has her favourite character also; and one which, though it do infinite credit to her judgment and feeling as an individual, happens unfortunately to be, of all others, perhaps the very worst adapted for dramatic or tragic representation. It is impossible, we think, to read any one of her plays, without feeling that the character which Miss Baillie thinks (and with great reason) the most amiable and engaging of all others, is that of cheerful good sense, united to calm, equable, and indulgent affections, — the character, in short, of rationality and habitual benevolence; — of which we think it must be admitted that, whatever precedence it may claim over more brilliant qualifications in real life, it is just as ill fitted to give spirit and effect to the fictions of the drama, as the qualities that shine most there are to soothe the moments of domestic privacy.

Every one of Miss Baillie's amiable characters, however, both male and female, leans visibly to this class of virtues. They are all marvellously dutiful and affectionate towards their near relations, and careful of the comforts of their servants and immediate dependants. They are laudably tolerant, too, of bad jokes proceeding from good hearts; and live in the practice of a sort of innocent gibing and good-natured raillery, which shows their disposition to be merry, and does no harm to any body. They are considerable despisers, moreover, of power and glory, and the other splendid illusions to which the less sober part of mankind are in the habit of sacrificing their happiness, — and much disposed to console themselves for the want of those turbulent enjoyments, by the solid comforts of content and a good conscience. Now, it is plain enough, we suppose, that these respectable and well-disposed persons are not very likely to excite a great interest by their appearances in tragedy; both on account of the very homeliness of their virtues, and of their not being at all the sort of persons either to perform the actions or to experience the emotions upon which the effect of that kind of moral tale is commonly thought to depend.

The fact is, however, that they are equally unfit for comedy; and it is chiefly to the excess of her very laudable predilection for them, that we are to ascribe Miss Baillie's uniform and admitted failure in this department of the drama. All her amiable personages are too reasonable, prudent, and placable, to excite any great interest or anxiety in their behalf; and the unamiable ones are little more than unreasonable, or ill-tempered — without ceasing to be tolerably sensible, and nearly as plain in their speech, and as sagacious in pursuit of their objects, as their more unexceptionable associates. The truth is, however, that Miss Baillie has no talent for writing comedy: she does not appear to us to comprehend in what the *vis comica* consists, or to have an idea that there ought to be amusing passages in a work intended for amusement: she has no gift, certainly, in devising or unfolding a story; and here her personages all go through their parts in such a sober and business-like manner, — there is so little of extravagance in any one character — so little spontaneous wit or discursive humour — such an entire absence, in short, of brilliant or ornamental writing, that one would almost imagine that she held the

laws of good taste to be the same for a comedy as for a sermon ; — nor could we have at all explained the phenomenon of her continual failure, if we had not recollected her constant and excessive partiality for the moderately cheerful and very reasonable persons we have just alluded to, — out of love and deference for whom she seems to have settled it with herself, that the gaiety of comedy should never rise above the tone of good-humoured conversation among plain and ordinary people ; and should never be pursued any farther than such worthy persons are in the practice of letting their jokes carry them from their business. The brilliancy and extravagance of fancy that fascinate more frivolous beings, appear to her, we have no doubt, very fatiguing and unprofitable, — and we are afraid that she may even look upon the amplifications of Falstaff and the sallies of Mercutio or Benedict as mere raving and folly, and on the turns and repartees of Congreve and Sheridan as impertinent interruptions to the business of the play. It is certain, at least, that her comedies show a great deal of good sense, and a plentiful lack of wit ; and we think we adopt a most charitable theory, when we ascribe to her predilection for that substantial quality, their deficiency in a more appropriate ornament.

The *passions*, as to what relates to the drama, really are not very distinguishable from the characters ; and the most of what we have now said as to the latter, is applicable therefore to them also. We must observe, however, that, in her later works especially, Miss Baillie has presented us rather with a theoretical amplification of the progress of a passion in general, than with its natural expression in the character of any one individual. The elaborate purpose of tracing it through all its gradations, and investing it with all its attributes, is by far too manifest throughout. Our attention, in short, is directed more to its anatomy than to its living action; and we rise from the perusal, even of her most successful attempts, with a consciousness rather of having been instructed in the nature of the passion in question, than of having witnessed its natural operation, or been made to sympathise with its victims.

We come now to the last chapter of this fair writer's offences, or those which relate to the matter of style and diction ; which, we are concerned to say, appears to us the heaviest of the whole ; not, however, so much because her taste is bad, as because her stock is deplorably scanty. Almost all the words she has, she has borrowed from our old dramatists ; but her credit with them seems to have been so limited, that her debt is incredibly small ; and the leading character of her style, therefore, is a poorness and narrowness of diction altogether without example, we think, in this voluble age, — and only rendered more conspicuous by the constrained and unnatural air produced by her affectation of antiquated phraseology, and the contrast which this affords to the carelessness, copiousness, and freedom of the true old style, which is thus brought to our recollection. She seems to have no ear for the melody of blank verse, — and especially of that easy and colloquial verse which is alone suited to the purposes of the drama ; — while her words continually remind us of Shakspeare, or Beaumont and Fletcher, it is impossible to imagine any thing so utterly opposite as the richness, lightness, and flexibility of their style, and the poverty and cumbrousness of hers — except, perhaps, the heavy, lifeless, and unwieldy structure of her verses, when compared with the light and capricious undulations of theirs.

We do not see much merit in using an antiquated diction on any occasion, — and least of all in the drama, — where the great object is to copy living nature to the satisfaction of living judges. Whatever beauty such

a style may possess, however, must obviously be derived from its tendency to remind us of the *beauties* of those memorable authors who wrote in it before it had acquired the character of antiquity; and the first rule for the use of it should therefore be, that it should be the style of their beautiful passages; and that no old word should be admitted in a modern poem, which does not hold a conspicuous station in some admired verse of an ancient one. But, though even our milliners have sense enough to copy only Queen Mary's cap, or Queen Elizabeth's ruff, and not their tremendous stays, or their stockings of woollen cloth, our literary artisans have not yet attained to the same degree of discrimination. The Spectator takes notice, we think, of a play which professed, in his day, to be written in the very style of Shakspeare, upon the strength of its containing this line — "And so good morrow to you, good master lieutenant:" and the public, in our own time, very nearly swallowed an incredible quantity of trash, under the name of the same great author, upon no other inducement, that we could discover, than that all the words were spelled with a double allowance of consonants. Miss Baillie has not gone quite so far as this; but she has sinned perpetually against the canon which we have presumed to lay down for the legitimate use of an obsolete phraseology: she has not copied any of Shakspeare's fine expressions; and has almost always used the style of his age, only where it was less dignified and less intelligible than that of her own. A noble knight, for instance, instead of saying that a painful recollection wounds him deeply, always takes care to say, "In faith, it galls me shrewdly;"— and another wishes his adversary's conscience, in like manner, "to gnaw him shrewdly." Then all the personages are uniformly "full glad," and "full sorry," and "full well," and "full ready;" — and all the coats, hats, and armour in the volume (which, by the way, pass under the elegant appellation of geer) are invariably "doffed" and "donned" by their wearers;— and the author's good simple people generally "trow" what other people believe; and those who are reprimanded or checked are still said to be "shent." We took the liberty to rebuke Miss Baillie, on a former occasion, for the frequent use of this paltry and affected word; but, in spite of all our pains, we have it here again in the very first play in the volume — where, by way of apology for its re-appearance, we find it used by one noble baron who likens another to "a shent cur" barking at its master's door!

What makes all this the more lamentable is, that Miss Baillie is very obviously by no means an expert or learned archaiologist; and not only uses these and such like very scurvy and sore-worn fragments of old speech incorrectly and injudiciously, but mixes them up, in a most unseemly manner, with the meanest and most unpoetical neologisms. The same chieftain who is "shrewdly galled" in one page, talks of "sombre banishment" in the next; and after bidding "God wot" that he was aware of his son's defects, immediately observes, that

> ——————"ne'ertheless
> He still has parts and talents; though obscured
> By some untoward failings."

And a fair lady, who has been speaking of "geer," and "clutching," and "harness," and "torn hose," presently exclaims, in the most business-like and peremptory manner, that,

> "In short, she would, without another's leave,
> Improve the low condition of her peasants."

It is needless, however, to multiply examples of this low and discordant

style at present; because this and all its other peculiarities will be more copiously and fairly illustrated by the specimens which we may be induced, for other purposes, to extract from the volume before us. But we cannot leave even this general view of the subject without observing, that, either from mere want of words, or from a strange misconception of the style and licence of our older writers, Miss Baillie has indulged herself very frequently in a manner of writing that could not have been endured at any period, and of which it may be fairly said, that it is neither verse nor language at all. She has a habit, in particular, of transposing the substantive and auxiliary verbs in a way that is exceedingly distressing; and certainly would not be tolerated in a schoolboy's first copy of English verses. The reader may conjecture what effect it has on the general air of her composition, when he is informed, that the following instances of it have forced themselves on our notice, in turning over the leaves of the first play in this volume for a very different purpose: —

"Full well I know why thou so merry *art*."

———— "Thou wrong'st me much
To think my merriment a reference *hath*."

———. "All thy sex
Stubborn and headstrong *are*."

"Here is a place in which some traces *are*."

"To whom
Hosts of the earth, with the departed dead
Subjected *are*."

"That to the awful steps that tread upon you
Unconscious *are*."

"The living and the dead together *are*."

"Fell is the stroke, if mercy in it *be*."

The effect of these "most lame and impotent conclusions" on the melody of the verse, is scarcely less deplorable than their cruel operation on the sense; but the truth is, that the melody of Miss Baillie's blank verse is not to be hurt by trifles — there being nothing in the whole range of modern poetry half so clumsy and untuneful as the greater part of her unrhymed versification.

We will not, however, pursue the ungrateful theme of her faults any farther; but, before closing this hasty and unintended sketch of her poetical character, shall add a word or two, as both duty and inclination prompt us to do, on the more pleasing subject of her merits. And here we must give the first place, we believe, to the tone of good sense and amiable feeling which pervades every part of her performances; and which, wherever they are found to be habitual and unaffected, impart a charm, even to poetical compositions, which compensates for the want of many more splendid attributes. Miss Baillie is not only very moral, and intelligently moral; but there is, in all her writings, a character of indulgent and vigilant affection for her species, and of a goodness that is both magnanimous and practical, which we do not know that we have traced, in the same degree, in the compositions of any other writer. Then she has a very considerable knowledge of human nature, and an uncommon

talent of representing (though not in the best dramatical form) the peculiar symptoms and natural developement of various passions; so that her plays may always be read with a certain degree of instruction, — and cannot be read without feelings of great respect for the penetration and sagacity of their author. Even as to style and diction, while we lament both the poverty and the constraint of which we have been compelled to take notice, it is but fair to say, that Miss Baillie appears to us to have had good taste enough to keep her eye pretty constantly on the best models; and that even her poverty has not been able to seduce her into those flowery paths, where the poorest, if they are regardless of purity, may, with small labour, become as rich, or at least as gaudy, as their neighbours. Finally, we think Miss Baillie entitled to very high and unmingled praise, for the beauty of many detached passages in every one of her metrical compositions; — passages that possess many of the higher qualities of fine and original poetry; and which, if they were only a little longer, and a little more numerous, would entitle her to take her place on a level with the most distinguished names that have illustrated this age of poetry. Few and far between as they are, they are decisive, we think, of her genius and capacity; and though we do not think they are in danger of being lost and forgotten amidst the mass of baser matter with which they are now surrounded, they make it a duty in all who are aware of their value, to unite their efforts both for their rescue and their multiplication.

JAMES GRAHAME.*

We have no great predilection, we must say, for didactic poetry of any sort, — at least, where it corresponds with its title, and really aims at teaching; and though there are several pieces that have obtained much merited celebrity under that title, we suspect that it has been earned by the passages to which it was least applicable. Some have pleased by the liveliness and beauty of the descriptions which they contained; others by the exquisite polish and elegance of the composition; and the greater part, perhaps, by their episodes and digressions. Who reads the precepts of Hesiod, or the arguments of Lucretius? — or even the maxims about sowing and reaping in Virgil, or the theory of laughter and of general ideas in Akenside?

The poem before us, we fear, will not take away this reproach of the didactic Muse; and may, indeed, be divided, more certainly and commodiously than most of its family, into the two great compartments of the legible and the illegible. The agricultural precepts, which are as dull and prosaic as any precepts we ever met with, fortunately are not very intimately mixed up with the descriptive and poetical passages; and those, which are often of great beauty and pathos, are generally so detached and complete in themselves, that they might have stood as well in any other work which treated of rural life and rural scenery; and may be perfectly relished and understood by those who are wicked enough to skip over all the agricultural learning of the volume.

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* Grahame's British Georgics.—Vol. xvi. p. 213. April, 1810

Though "Georgics" may be, as Mr. Grahame assures us, the proper appellation for all treatises of husbandry in verse, the "Scottish Farmer's Kalendar" would have been a title more descriptive of the plan and substance of the work before us. Not only is the whole scenery borrowed from this end of the island, but the poem is divided into twelve parts or sections, arranged in the order, and under the names of the twelve months of the year, and containing full directions for all farm-work proper to each month respectively, as well as some fine descriptions of the successive appearances of the country, and the condition of its inhabitants; together with many little episodes and reflections arising out of these considerations.

In thus putting the whole year into blank verse, it was evidently next to impossible to avoid clashing with the author of the Seasons;—and those, accordingly, who are jealous of Thomson's original invention, will find frequent occasion to complain of the author before us. At the same time, there are many points in which we think his merits must be admitted by all lovers of poetry, and his originality confessed by the warmest admirers of Thomson. The singular fidelity and clearness of his descriptions, prove him to have studied all his pictures for himself, in nature;—a certain simplicity of thought, and softness of heart, give a peculiar character to his manner, that excludes all idea of imitation; and his fine and discriminating pictures of the Scottish landscape, and the Scottish peasantry, are as new in their subject, as they are excellent in the execution.

There is something irresistibly pleasing in the faithful representation of external nature, even in her simplest and most ordinary aspects. All men have interesting associations with dawnings and sunsets:—and the returns of summer and winter, as they indicate themselves upon the woods and waters, the mountains and fields of our home scenery, recall to every bosom a thousand impressions, more deep and touching than can usually be excited by objects far more new and extraordinary. A lively picture of nature, therefore, pleases everybody—and is the only thing, perhaps that does so. Nor are we very apt, while we feel indebted to the artist for a clear and striking conception, to blame him for having painted what is common, or even what had been often painted before. If a descriptive poet makes us feel distinctly that he is copying nature, and not from his predecessors, we excuse a good deal of coincidence, and really receive a new impression from a new portrait of the same grand original.

Mr. Grahame's descriptions appear to us to be remarkable for their great fidelity, minuteness, and brevity,—for the singular simplicity and directness with which they are brought out,—and for a kind of artless earnestness in the manner of their execution, which shows the author to have been entirely occupied with the care of rendering faithfully and exactly what was present to his eye or his memory. There is no ambition to be fine or striking,—and no great concern, apparently, about the distant effect or ideal perfection of his landscape,—but an honest determination and endeavour to give his readers precisely what was before him,—and to communicate faithfully to them what had actually made an impression on himself. In this way, he seldom thinks it necessary to call in the aid of exaggeration, or to invent any picturesque or extraordinary circumstances to bespeak an interest for his delineations; but presents his scenes successively in all their native plainness and simplicity,—noting down all the features that really occur in them, without

concerning himself whether other poets have represented them or not, — and stopping when these are exhausted, however abrupt or imperfect the composition may consequently appear. The effect of this plan of writing is, that his descriptions are almost always strong and impressive, and present the most distinct and vivid images to the fancy; although they are not often heightened by any great glow of genius or animation, and are frequently broken and irregular, or deficient in that keeping which may be found in the works of those who write more from the love of the art than of the subject.

The great charm, however, of Mr. Grahame's poetry, appears to us to consist in its moral character, — in that natural expression of kindness and tenderness of heart, which gives such a peculiar air of paternal goodness and patriarchal simplicity to his writings, — and that earnest and intimate sympathy with the objects of his compassion, which assures us at once that he is not making a theatrical display of sensibility, but merely giving vent to the familiar sentiments of his bosom. We can trace here, in short, and with the same pleasing effects, that entire absence of all art, effort, and affectation, which we have already noticed as the most remarkable distinction of his attempts in description. Almost all the other poets with whom we are acquainted, appear but too obviously to put their feelings and affections, as well as their fancies and phrases, into a sort of studied dress, before they venture to present them to the crowded assembly of the public: and though the style and fashion of this dress varies according to the taste and ability of the inventors, still it serves almost equally to hide their native proportions, and to prove that they were a little ashamed or afraid to exhibit them as they really were. The greater part of those who have aimed at producing a pathetic effect, have attempted to raise and exalt both the characters of their personages and the language in which they are spoken of; and thus to seek an excuse, as it were, for their sensibility in the illusions of vulgar admiration; others have aggravated their distresses with strange and incredible complications, — that it might appear that they did not disturb themselves on light and ordinary grounds: and some few have dressed out both themselves and their heroes in such a tissue of whimsical and capricious affectations, that they are still less in danger than their neighbours of being suspected of indulging in the vulgar sympathies of our nature. Now, Mr. Grahame, we think, has got over this general nervousness and shyness about showing the natural and simple feelings with which the contemplation of human emotion should affect us — or rather, has been too seriously occupied, and too constantly engrossed with the feelings themselves, to think how the confession of them might be taken by the generality of his readers, — to concern himself about the contempt of the fastidious, or the derision of the unfeeling. In his poetry, therefore, we meet neither with the Musidoras and Damons of Thomson, nor the gipsywomen and Ellen Orfords of Crabbe; and still less with the Matthew Schoolmasters, Alice Fells, or Martha Raes of Mr. Wordsworth; — but we meet with the ordinary peasants of Scotland in their ordinary situations, and with a touching and simple expression of concern for their sufferings, and of generous indulgence for their faults. He is not ashamed of his kindness and condescension, on the one hand; nor is he ostentatious or vain of it, on the other — but gives expression in the most plain and unaffected manner to sentiments that are neither counterfeited nor disguised. We do not know any poetry, indeed, that lets us in so directly to the heart of the writer, and produces so full and

pleasing a conviction that it is dictated by the genuine feelings which it aims at communicating to the reader. If there be less fire and elevation than in the strains of some of his contemporaries, there is more truth and tenderness than is commonly found along with those qualities, and less getting up either of language or of sentiment than we recollect to have met with in any modern composition.

The last peculiarity by which Mr. Grahame's poetry is recommended to us, is one which we hesitate a little about naming to our English readers:—to be candid with them, however, it is his great nationality. We do love him in our hearts, we are afraid, for speaking so affectionately of Scotland. But, independent of this partial bias, we must say, that the exquisitely correct pictures which he has drawn of Scottish rustics, and of Scottish rural scenery, have a merit, which even English critics would not think we had overrated if they were as well qualified as we are to judge of their fidelity. We will add, too, in spite of the imputations to which it may expose us, that the rustics of Scotland are a far more interesting race, and far fitter subjects for poetry, than their brethren of the same condition in the South. They are much more thoughtful, pious, and intelligent—have more delicacy in their affections, and more reflecting, patient, and serious kindness in their natures. To say all in a word, they are far less *brutish* than the great body of the English peasantry. At the same time, from being poorer and more lonely, their characters and way of life are more truly simple, while the very want of comfort and accommodation with which they are sometimes surrounded, holds more of the antique age, and connects them more closely with those primitive times, with the customs and even the history of which they are still so generally familiar. The Scottish landscape, too, we must be pardoned for thinking, is better suited for poetical purposes than the prevailing scenery of England. Its great extent and openness—the slight shade of dreariness that is commonly thrown over both its beauty and its sublimity—and the air of wildness and antiquity which it derives from its rocky hills and unploughed valleys,—possess a charm, both to the natives and to strangers, that leads far more readily to poetical associations than the fertile fields and snug villages of the South.

DE LILLE.*

It is now upwards of twenty years since the poem of "Les Jardins" began to be read out of France; and, in the course of that time, it has been translated into almost all the languages of Europe, and been made the subject of criticism and imitation from Warsaw to Naples. A reputation that prevails so universally, and is retained so long, must necessarily be merited; and it would not only be presumptuous, but absurd, to call in question the reality of those excellencies, to which the whole European world has borne so unequivocal a testimony. We may be permitted, however, to enquire a little into the peculiar nature of those merits which have met with so general approbation; and to onsider whether they are not attended with any characteristic defects.

* Le Malheur et la Pitié: Poëme en Quatre Chants.—Vol. iii. p. 26. October, 1803.

It probably will not appear very flattering to a French writer, or to his French admirers, to say, that De Lille has extended his reputation, chiefly by abandoning his national peculiarities, and added materially to the beauty of his compositions, by accommodating them to the taste of his neighbours. Yet such, it appears to us, is undoubtedly the case with M. de Lille. He has recommended his works to general perusal, by departing, in a good measure, from the common poetical style of his countrymen; by adopting, freely, the beauties of the surrounding countries, and forming himself upon the model of all that appeared to him to be excellent in the poetry of modern Europe. French poetry, we are inclined to suspect, never had any very sincere admirers out of France. The general diffusion of the language of that people, the excellence of many of their writings, and their early proficiency in criticism and the *belles lettres*, had indeed given a certain currency to most of their domestic favourites, and spread into the circulation of Europe, whatever had received the stamp of Parisian approbation. But their reception was more owing to the authority by which they were recommended, than to their own powers of universal fascination. Men wished to admire the poems of those whose prose was in general so delightful; and seldom had courage to set up their own judgment in opposition to the sentence of a tribunal that was, for the most part, so enlightened. French poetry was read, therefore, and applauded over all Europe, without being sincerely admired. Some pretended to be enchanted with it, and others imagined that they were so; while all the men of letters spoke of it with deference, and condemned, without mercy, all that resembled it in the productions of their own countrymen. Although a poet who had obtained reputation in France was not sure, therefore, of pleasing all the rest of Europe, he came before his foreign readers with very considerable advantages. He was certain of being patiently and favourably listened to, and might assure himself, that many would applaud, and that the greater part would be willing to admire. As soon, therefore, as a French poet appeared, who was willing to lay aside the gaudy *costume* of his country, and to accommodate himself to the taste of the other European nations, it was to be expected that his popularity would be at least equal to his merits. It was reserved for M. de Lille to make this experiment; and we are really persuaded that a very great share of his reputation is to be ascribed to its success.

It is chiefly from the modern poets of England, that M. de Lille has borrowed the peculiarities of his manner. Besides the obvious and avowed imitations of Pope, Addison, Goldsmith, Cowper, and Darwin, that occur in the present publication, there is something in the whole temper and complexion of his compositions, that certainly does not belong to the genuine school of French poetry. The prose of Rousseau and of Florian may have afforded some instances of it: but if it had a poetical origin, it must have been borrowed from the poetry of England. The great vice of the French poets was an affected magnificence of diction, and elevation of sentiment, that admitted of no relaxation, and precluded, in a great degree, all that was interesting or natural. The charm of easy and powerful expression was generally sacrificed to the support of a certain sonorous and empty dignity; the picturesque effect of individual description was lost in cold generalities; character was effaced, by the prevalence of one glittering uniform; and high-sounding *sentiments* were substituted for the language of nature and of passion. In this way, almost all the serious poetry of France had come to resemble the declamation of

a hired pleader, in which no imitation of nature was so much as attempted; but all kinds of reflections and antitheses were thrown together in a style of affected passion and false elevation. Every English reader, we apprehend, must have felt how little painting there is in the poetry of France, and how much more it deals in thoughts than in images. It is full of reasoning and ingenuity, and abounds in all the graces of polite and elegant expression; but there is little that comes distinctly forward to the imagination or the heart; and we are never tempted, for a moment, to believe in the inspiration of the author.

M. de Lille has corrected a great number of these defects, and divested the poetry of his country of a great deal of that artificial stateliness which was so fatal to its pathetic effect. Instead of vague and lofty declamation, he has presented his readers with minute and faithful descriptions of all that was interesting in his subjects; and has impressed them with the feelings he was desirous of communicating, not by running over all the verbs and interjections that were supposed to denote them, but by placing before their eyes a living picture of the situations in which they must arise. In another particular, too, M. de Lille may be considered as an innovator in French poetry, and a follower of the English writers. He is the first, we believe, in that country, who has succeeded in embellishing his compositions with representations of rustic scenery, and rustic virtues and occupations. His predecessors spoke, indeed, of groves and fountains, and paraded their muses, as of old, among thickets and upon lawns; but they spoke of them as they did of the tigers and lions which were found in their company in the writers of antiquity, and neither pretended to detain their readers among them, nor to delineate them with the fulness and precision of realities. M. de Lille has made them familiar, however, with cottages and farms, and rendered current in verse the whole phraseology of planting and enclosing. He has dwelt, with great feeling and effect, upon the contemplative and innocent pleasures that a rural situation may afford, and has contrived to describe them in language so pure and so elegant, that even the Parisians have perused them without derision or disgust. He has not only ventured to speak of the country, but has had the courage to take an interest in its inhabitants. The older French poets were utterly unacquainted with cottagers and husbandmen. Their only rustic personages were shepherds and shepherdesses, who asked for nothing but sympathy, and laboured at nothing but singing. M. de Lille has introduced the real peasant and labourer to the acquaintance of his readers; has represented their occupations, their pleasures, and their virtues; and has solicited relief for their sufferings, and respect for their services. All this is familiar to English poetry; but it was new to that of France.

M. de Lille, finally, is a much greater philanthropist than any of his predecessors we remember; and betrays, throughout, a sort of sentimental tenderness, and delicacy of feeling, that did not enter before into our conception of a French poet. His morality is perfectly pure; and there is not a page in his writings, in which he does not labour to enforce it. There is no poetry with which we are acquainted, indeed, that is so uniformly and zealously moral.

But though, in these and some other particulars, M. de Lille bears a much greater resemblance to the poets of England, than to those of his own country, we must not imagine, by any means, that he has entirely renounced his national taste, or conducted himself in every thing according to our notions of propriety. Nor are we, on the other hand, to

conceive that M. de Lille is a writer of a warm and enthusiastic imagination, who has been hurried into a disregard of his national models by the impulse of a bold and creative imagination, or from any ardour of temperament that disdained the control of authority. He is, in truth, a great deal more distinguished for correctness and delicacy of taste, than for original or inventive genius; and while he has done us the honour of preferring our authors to his own, he has not copied any thing that could not be justified by classical usage, or the most rigorous canons of criticism. He has prudently abstained, therefore, from attempting to imitate those higher graces of composition, which no imitator is ever permitted to attain; and has confined himself to those accomplishments of fine writing that may always be reached by the union of elegant taste and diligent application. Although most of his writings, therefore, recall to us the general manner of English poetry, we shall be but seldom reminded of the loftier flights of Milton, the luxuriant tenderness of Thomson, or the fairy fancy and magical facility of Shakspeare. We shall find more of the pointed polish and elaborate elegance of Pope, the dignified and correct tenderness of Goldsmith, and the dazzling amplifications of Darwin. M. de Lille, in short, is a refined, studied, polite, and accomplished writer, who never forgets himself in the ardour of composition, and seldom lets the reader forget him; who culls out the nicest phrases, and most unexceptionable images; and oftener reminds us that the description is beautiful, than he imposes upon us with the belief of its reality. He belongs to that class of poets that may be said to be of *secondary formation*, and that could not have existed if a hardier race had not existed before them. He does not wander in the pathless places of Parnassus, nor gather flowers where no poetical foot had ever trodden before him. He has the praise of judicious selection, artful disposition, and dignified imitation. He has reached the eminence upon which he stands, by following with attention the footsteps of those who have mounted still higher. He has become a poet by reading and patient discipline; and probably could not have written "Les Jardins," if he had not begun with a translation of Virgil.

The subject of M. de Lille's poems does not naturally carry him into the higher regions of poetry, and he does not seek for occasions of elevation. The art of laying out pleasure-grounds, and of passing one's time agreeably in the country, might be discussed, no doubt, without trespassing on the provinces of the epic or the tragic writer; but admitted, at the same time, of a great deal of pathetic imagery, and a great variety of embellishment. It would be improper to enter upon any particular criticism of these poems, in this place; but there is one remark suggested by them, which applies so obviously to the general character of M. de Lille's genius, that no apology can be necessary for its insertion. The great part of the pleasure derived from poetical representations of rustic scenery and occupations, consists in a pleasing illusion of the imagination, that carries us back to the golden age of the poets, and soothes us into a temporary forgetfulness of all the vice and the artifice, the cares and perplexities, of real life. There is some period in every man's life, in which he has fancied that happiness and innocence were to be found among cottages and pastures, and desired to retire from the bustle and corruptions of the world, to some elegant and simple seclusion; and, as often as spleen or disappointment turn back his thoughts to this vision of his childhood, the dissipation and constraint of a city life always present themselves as objects of scorn and detestation. Whatever tends, there-

fore, to recall our thoughts to those incongruous objects, is misplaced in such a poem; it dispels the illusion, by the help of which alone such themes are capable of pleasing, and distracts the imagination from the train of images that engrossed it. Now, this fault, which is not chargeable either upon Virgil or Thomson, M. de Lille has certainly committed. He begins his encomium on a country life, with some critical remarks on the regulation of private theatres, and entertains his readers with a long enumeration of pompous villas, and great princes that inhabit them. He is constantly interspersing sarcastic and pointed reflections upon the dissipated and luxurious, and has composed the greater part of his poem in such an epigrammatic and courtly style, as is altogether unsuitable to the subjects upon which he is employed. Although enamoured of rural objects and employments, he seems anxious to convince his courtly readers, that he is as familiar as can be with the language and occupations of the polite world; and that, though he chooses to show his sensibility to obscure and sentimental pleasures, he possesses all the urbanity and accomplishments of a gentleman and a courtier. His whole style is infected with this peculiarity; he cannot avoid an ingenious turn, or a brilliant antithesis; and instead of the simple and enthusiastic votary of nature and virtue, he frequently appears like a fine gentleman paying compliments to the sylvan goddesses.

Upon the whole, we think that the genius of M. de Lille is rather of a pleasing than of a powerful character; and that the delicacy of his taste, and the elegance of his language, are a good deal more remarkable than the force of his imagination, or the originality of his invention. He will be relished most, we conceive, by those who admire rather the art, than the nature, of poetry; and though he will give delight to almost all who have been trained to the admiration of elegance, by the habitual study of fine writers, he will scarcely ever be found speaking in that universal language, by the use of which Shakspeare has found his way from the closet of the student, into the workshops of our manufacturers, and the cottages of our peasantry.

BURNS, No. 1.*

Burns is certainly by far the greatest of our poetical prodigies — from Stephen Duck down to Thomas Dermody. *They* are forgotten already; or only remembered for derision. But the name of Burns, if we are not mistaken, has not yet "gathered all its fame;" and will endure long after those circumstances are forgotten which contributed to its first notoriety. So much, indeed, are we impressed with a sense of his merits, that we cannot help thinking it a derogation from them to consider him as a prodigy at all; and are convinced that he will never be rightly estimated as a poet, till that vulgar wonder be entirely repressed which was raised on his having been a ploughman. It is true, no doubt, that he was born in an humble station, and that much of his early life was devoted to severe labour, and to the society of his fellow-labourers. But he was not himself either uneducated or illiterate; and was placed perhaps in a situation

* Cromek's Reliques of Burns. — Vol. xiii. p. 249. January, 1809.

more favourable to the developement of great poetical talents, than any other which could have been assigned him. He was taught, at a very early age, to read and write; and soon after acquired a competent knowledge of French, together with the elements of Latin and Geometry. His taste for reading was encouraged by his parents and many of his associates; and, before he had ever composed a single stanza, he was not only familiar with many prose writers, but far more intimately acquainted with Pope, Shakspeare, and Thomson, than nine tenths of the youth that leave school for the university. These authors, indeed, with some old collections of songs, and the lives of Hannibal and of Sir William Wallace, were his habitual study from the first days of his childhood; and, co-operating with the solitude of his rural occupations, were sufficient to rouse his ardent and ambitious mind to the love and the practice of poetry. He had as much scholarship, we imagine, as Shakspeare, and far better models to form his ear to harmony, and train his fancy to graceful invention.

We ventured, on a former occasion *, to say something of the effects of regular education, and of the general diffusion of literature, in repressing the vigour and originality of all kinds of mental exertion. That speculation was perhaps carried somewhat too far; but if the paradox have proof any where, it is in its application to poetry. Among well educated people, the standard writers of this description are at once so venerated and so familiar, that it is thought equally impossible to rival them, and to write verses without attempting it. If there be one degree of fame which excites emulation, there is another which leads to depair; nor can we conceive any one less likely to add one to the short list of original poets, than a young man of fine fancy and delicate taste, who has acquired a high relish for poetry, by perusing the most celebrated writers, and conversing with the most intelligent judges. The head of such a person is filled, of course, with all the splendid passages of ancient and modern authors, and with the fine and fastidious remarks which have been made even on these passages. When he turns his eyes, therefore, on his own conceptions, they can scarcely fail to appear rude and contemptible. He is perpetually haunted and depressed by the ideal presence of those great masters and their exacting critics. He is aware to what comparisons his productions will be subjected among his own friends and associates: and recollects the derision with which so many rash adventurers have been chased back to their obscurity. Thus the merit of his great predecessors chills, instead of encouraging, his ardour; and the illustrious names which have already reached to the summit of excellence, act like the tall and spreading trees of the forest, which overshadow and strangle the saplings which have struck root in the soil below,—and afford shelter to nothing but creepers and parasites.

There is, no doubt, in some few individuals, "that strong divinity of soul,"—that decided and irresistible vocation to glory, which, in spite of all these obstructions, calls out, perhaps, once or twice in a century, a bold and original poet from the herd of scholars and academical literati. But the natural tendency of their studies, and by far the most common operation, is to repress originality, and discourage enterprise; and either to change those whom nature meant for poets, into mere readers of poetry, or to bring them out in the form of witty parodists, or ingenious imitators. Independent of the reasons which have been already suggested, it will perhaps be found, too, that necessity is the mother of invention in this as

* Vol. viii. p. 329.

well as in the more vulgar arts; or, at least, that inventive genius will frequently slumber in inaction, where preceding ingenuity has in part supplied the wants of the owner. A solitary and uninstructed man, with lively feelings and an inflammable imagination, will be easily led to exercise those gifts, and to occupy and relieve his mind in poetical composition; but if his education, his reading, and his society supply him with an abundant store of images and emotions, he will probably think but little of these internal resources, and feed his mind contentedly with what has been provided by the industry of others.

To say nothing, therefore, of the distractions and the dissipation of mind that belong to the commerce of the world, nor of the cares of minute accuracy and high finishing which are imposed on the professed scholar, there seem to be deeper reasons for the separation of originality and accomplishment; and for the partiality which has led poetry to choose almost all her favourites among the recluse and uninstructed. A youth of quick parts, in short, and creative fancy, — with just so much reading as to guide his ambition, and rough hew his notions of excellence, — if his lot be thrown in humble retirement, where he has no reputation to lose, and where he can easily hope to excel all that he sees around him, is much more likely, we think, to give himself up to poetry, and to train himself to habits of invention, than if he had been encumbered by the pretended helps of extended study and literary society.

If these observations should fail to strike of themselves, they may perhaps derive additional weight from considering the very remarkable fact, that almost all the great poets of every country have appeared in an early stage of their history, and in a period comparatively rude and unlettered. Homer went forth like the morning star before the dawn of literature in Greece; and almost all the great and sublime poets of modern Europe are already between two and three hundred years old. Since that time, although books and readers, and opportunities of reading, are multiplied a thousand fold, we have improved chiefly in point and terseness of expression, in the art of raillery, and in clearness and simplicity of thought. Force, richness, and variety of invention, are now at least as rare as ever. But the literature and refinement of the age does not exist at all for a rustic and illiterate individual; and, consequently, the present time is to him what the rude times of old were to the vigorous writers which adorned them.

But though, for these and for other reasons, we can see no propriety in regarding the poetry of Burns chiefly as the wonderful work of a peasant, and thus admiring it much in the same way as if it had been written with his toes; yet there are peculiarities in his works which remind us of the lowness of his origin, and faults for which the defects of his education afford an obvious cause, if not a legitimate apology. In forming a correct estimate of these works, it is necessary to take into account those peculiarities.

The first is, the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective. The great boast of polished life is the delicacy, and even the generosity, of its hostility, — that quality which is still the characteristic, as it is the denomination, of a gentleman, — that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless, to strike the fallen, or to mangle the slain, — and enjoins us, in forging the shafts of satire, to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight. For this, as well as for other things, we are indebted to chivalry; and of this Burns had none. His ingenious and amiable biographer has spoken repeatedly in praise of his talents for

satire,—we think, with a most unhappy partiality. His epigrams and lampoons appear to us, one and all, unworthy of him;—offensive from their extreme coarseness and violence,—and contemptible from their want of wit or brilliancy. They seem to have been written, not out of playful malice or virtuous indignation, but out of fierce and ungovernable anger. His whole raillery consists in railing; and his satirical vein displays itself chiefly in calling names and in swearing. We say this mainly with a reference to his personalities. In many of his more general representations of life and manners, there is no doubt much that may be called satirical, mixed up with admirable humour, and description of inimitable vivacity.

There is a similar want of polish, or at least of respectfulness, in the general tone of his gallantry. He has written with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatsoever,—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and "sweet austere composure" of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. Accordingly, instead of suing for a smile, or melting in a tear, his muse deals in nothing but locked embraces and midnight rencontres; and, even in his complimentary effusions to ladies of the highest rank, is for straining them to the bosom of her impetuous votary. It is easy, accordingly, to see from his correspondence, that many of his female patronesses shrunk from the vehement familiarity of his admiration; and there are even some traits in the volumes before us, from which we can gather, that he resented the shyness and estrangement to which these feelings gave rise, with at least as little chivalry as he had shown in producing them.

But the leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity indeed of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility;—his belief, in short, in *the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels; nor can any thing be more lamentable, than that it should have found a patron in such a man as Burns, and communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality, at once contemptible and hateful. It is but too true, that men of the highest genius have frequently been hurried by their passions into a violation of prudence and duty; and there is something generous, at least, in the apology which their admirers may make for them, on the score of their keener feelings and habitual want of reflection. But this apology, which is quite unsatisfactory in the mouth of another, becomes an insult and an absurdity whenever it proceeds from their own. A man may say of his friend, that he is a noble-hearted fellow,—too generous to be just, and with too much spirit to be always prudent and regular. But he cannot be allowed to say even this of himself; and still less to represent himself as a hairbrained sentimental soul, constantly carried away by fine fancies and visions of love and philanthropy, and born to confound and despise the cold-blooded sons of prudence and sobriety. This apology evidently destroys itself; for it shows that conduct to be the result of deliberate system, which it affects

at the same time to justify as the fruit of mere thoughtlessness and casual impulse. Such protestations, therefore, will always be treated, as they deserve, not only with contempt, but with incredulity; and their magnanimous authors set down as determined profligates, who seek to disguise their selfishness under a name somewhat less revolting. That profligacy is almost always selfishness, and that the excuse of impetuous feeling can hardly ever be justly pleaded for those who neglect the ordinary duties of life, must be apparent, we think, even to the least reflecting of those sons of fancy and song. It requires no habit of deep thinking, nor any thing more, indeed, than the information of an honest heart, to perceive that it is cruel and base to spend, in vain superfluities, that money which belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesman and his famishing infants; or that it is a vile prostitution of language, to talk of that man's generosity or goodness of heart, who sits raving about friendship and philanthropy in a tavern, while his wife's heart is breaking at her cheerless fireside, and his children pining in solitary poverty.

This pitiful cant of careless feeling and eccentric genius, accordingly, has never found much favour in the eyes of English sense and morality. The most signal effect which it ever produced, was on the muddy brains of some German youth, who left college in a body to rob on the highway, because Schiller had represented the captain of a gang as so very noble a creature. But in this country, we believe, a predilection for that honourable profession must have preceded this admiration of the character. The style we have been speaking of, accordingly, is now the heroics only of the hulks and the house of correction; and has no chance, we suppose, of being greatly admired, except in the farewell speech of a young gentleman preparing for Botany Bay.

It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error. He is perpetually making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability, and imprudence, and talking with much complacency and exultation of the offence he has occasioned to the sober and correct part of mankind. This odious slang infects almost all his prose, and a very great proportion of his poetry; and is, we are persuaded, the chief, if not the only source of the disgust with which, in spite of his genius, we know that he is regarded by many very competent and liberal judges. His apology, too, we are willing to believe, is to be found in the original lowness of his situation, and the slightness of his acquaintance with the world. With his talents and powers of observation, he could not have seen *much* of the beings who echoed this raving, without feeling for them that distrust and contempt which would have made him blush to think he had ever stretched over them the protecting shield of his genius.

Akin to this most lamentable trait of vulgarity, and indeed in some measure arising out of it, is that perpetual boast of his own independence, which is obtruded upon the readers of Burns in almost every page of his writings. The sentiment itself is noble, and it is often finely expressed; —but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked; and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up too in Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance; and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant than the colour and natural elevation of a generous mind.

The last of the symptoms of rusticity which we think it necessary to notice in the works of this extraordinary man, is that frequent mistake of mere exaggeration and violence, for force and sublimity, which has

defaced so much of his prose composition, and given an air of heaviness and labour to a good deal of his serious poetry. The truth is, that his *forte* was in humour and in pathos—or rather in tenderness of feeling; and that he has very seldom succeeded, either where mere wit and sprightliness, or where great energy and weight of sentiment were requisite. He had evidently a very false and crude notion of what constituted *strength* of writing; and instead of that simple and brief directness which stamps the character of vigour upon every syllable, has generally had recourse to a mere accumulation of hyperbolical expressions, which encumber the diction instead of exalting it, and show the determination to be impressive, without the power of executing it. This error also we are inclined to ascribe entirely to the defects of his education. The value of simplicity in the expression of passion, is a lesson, we believe, of nature and of genius;—but its importance in mere grave and impressive writing, is one of the latest discoveries of rhetorical experience.

With the allowances and exceptions we have now stated, we think Burns entitled to the rank of a great and original genius. He has in all his compositions great force of conception; and great spirit and animation in its expression. He has taken a large range through the region of Fancy, and naturalised himself in almost all her climates. He has great humour,—great powers of description,—great pathos,—and great discrimination of character. Almost every thing that he says has spirit and originality; and every thing that he says well, is characterised by a charming facility, which gives a grace even to occasional rudeness, and communicates to the reader a delightful sympathy with the spontaneous soaring and conscious inspiration of the poet.

Considering the reception which these works have met with from the public, and the long period during which the greater part of them have been in their possession, it may appear superfluous to say any thing as to their characteristic or peculiar merit. Though the ultimate judgment of the public, however, be always sound, or at least decisive, as to its general result, it is not always very apparent upon what grounds it has proceeded; nor in consequence of what, or in spite of what, it has been obtained. In Burns's works there is much to censure, as well as much to praise; and as time has not yet separated his ore from its dross, it may be worth while to state, in a very general way, what we presume to anticipate as the result of this separation. Without pretending to enter at all into the comparative merit of particular passages, we may venture to lay it down as our opinion,—that his poetry is far superior to his prose; that his Scottish compositions are greatly to be preferred to his English ones; and that his Songs will probably outlive all his other productions.

The prose works of Burns consist almost entirely of his letters. They bear, as well as his poetry, the seal and the impress of his genius; but they contain much more bad taste, and are written with far more apparent labour. His poetry was almost all written primarily from feeling, and only secondarily from ambition. His letters seem to have been nearly all composed as exercises, and for display. There are few of them written with simplicity or plainness; and though natural enough as to the sentiment, they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression. A very great proportion of them, too, relate neither to facts nor feelings peculiarly connected with the author or his correspondent; but are made up of general declamation, moral reflections, and vague discussions,—all evidently composed for the sake of effect, and frequently introduced with

long complaints of having nothing to say, and of the necessity and difficulty of letter-writing.

By far the best of these compositions are such as we should consider as exceptions from this general character, — such as contain some specific information as to himself, or are suggested by events or observations directly applicable to his correspondent. One of the best, perhaps, is that addressed to Dr. Moore, containing an account of his early life, of which Dr. Currie has made such a judicious use in his Biography. It is written with great clearness and characteristic effect, and contains many touches of easy humour and natural eloquence. We are struck, as we open the book accidentally, with the following original application of a classical image by this unlettered rustic. Talking of the first vague aspirations of his own gigantic mind, he says, — we think very finely — "I had felt some early stirrings of ambition; but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclop round the walls of his cave." Of his other letters, those addressed to Mrs. Dunlop are, in our opinion, by far the best. He appears, from first to last, to have stood somewhat in awe of this excellent lady, and to have been no less sensible of her sound judgment and strict sense of propriety, than of her steady and generous partiality.

We must apprise our southern readers, that all his best pieces are written in Scotch; and that it is impossible for them to form any adequate judgment of their merits, without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language. To be able to translate the words, is but a small part of the knowledge that is necessary. The whole genius and idiom of the language must be familiar; and the characters, and habits, and associations of those who speak it. We beg leave, too, in passing, to observe, that this Scotch is not to be considered as a provincial dialect, — the vehicle only of rustic vulgarity and rude local humour. It is the language of a whole country, — long an independent kingdom, and still separate in laws, character, and manners. It is by means peculiar to the vulgar; but is the common speech of the whole nation in early life, — and with many of its most exalted and accomplished individuals throughout their whole existence; and if it be true that in later times it has been, in some measure, laid aside by the more ambitious and aspiring of the present generation, it is still recollected, even by them, as the familiar language of their childhood, and of those who were the earliest objects of their love and veneration. It is connected, in their imagination, not only with that olden time which is uniformly conceived as more pure, lofty, and simple than the present, but also with all the soft and bright colours of remembered childhood and domestic affection. All its phrases conjure up images of school-day innocence, and sports, and friendships, which have no pattern in succeeding years. Add to all this, that it is the language of a great body of poetry, with which almost all Scotchmen are familiar; and, in particular, of a great multitude of songs, written with more tenderness, nature, and feeling, than any other lyric compositions that are extant, and we may perhaps be allowed to say, that the Scotch is, in reality, a highly poetical language; and that it is an ignorant as well as an illiberal prejudice, which would seek to confound it with the barbarous dialects of Yorkshire or Devon. In composing his Scottish poems, therefore, Burns did not make an instinctive and necessary use of the only dialect he could employ. The last letter which we have quoted, proves, that before he had penned a singe couplet, he could write in the dialect of England with far greater purity and

propriety than nine-tenths of those who are called well educated in that country. He wrote in Scotch, because the writings which he most aspired to imitate were composed in that language; and it is evident, from the variations preserved by Dr. Currie, that he took much greater pains with the beauty and purity of his expressions in Scotch than in English, and, every one who understands both must admit, with infinitely better success.

We have said that Burns is almost equally distinguished for his tenderness and his humour: — we might have added, for a faculty of combining them both in the same subject, not altogether without parallel in the older poets and balladmakers, but altogether singular, we think, among modern critics. The passages of pure humour are entirely Scottish, — and untranslatable. They consist in the most picturesque representations of life and manners, enlivened, and even exalted, by traits of exquisite sagacity and unexpected reflection. His tenderness is of two sorts; that which is combined with circumstances and characters of humble and sometimes ludicrous simplicity; and that which is produced by gloomy and distressful impressions acting on a mind of keen sensibility. The passages which belong to the former description are, we think, the most exquisite and original, and, in our estimation, indicate the greatest and most amiable turn of genius; both as being accompanied by fine and feeling pictures of humble life, and as requiring that delicacy as well as justness of conception, by which alone the fastidiousness of an ordinary reader can be reconciled to such representations. The exquisite description of "The Cotter's Saturday Night" affords, perhaps, the finest example of this sort of pathetic. Its whole beauty cannot, indeed, be discerned but by those whom experience has enabled to judge of the admirable fidelity and completeness of the picture.

The charm of the fine lines written on turning up a mouse's nest with the plough, will also be found to consist in the simple tenderness of the delineation.

The verses to a Mountain Daisy, though more elegant and picturesque, seem to derive their chief beauty from the same sentiment.

There are many touches of the same kind in most of the popular and beautiful poems in this collection, especially in the Winter Night — the address to his old Mare — the address to the Devil, &c.; — in all which, though the greater part of the piece be merely ludicrous and picturesque, there are traits of a delicate and tender feeling, indicating that unaffected softness of heart which is always so enchanting.

The finest examples, however, of this simple and unpretending tenderness, is to be found in those songs which are likely to transmit the name of Burns to all future generations. He found this delightful trait in the old Scottish ballads, which he took for his model, and upon which he has improved with a felicity and delicacy of imitation altogether unrivalled in the history of literature.

We shall conclude with two general remarks — the one national, the other critical. The first is, that it is impossible to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of the peasantry, than most of those in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain. Without meaning to deny that he himself was endowed with rare and extraordinary gifts of genius and fancy, it is evident, from the whole details of his history, as well as from the letters of his brother, and the testimony of Mr. Murdoch and

others to the character of his father, that the whole family, and many of their associates, who have never emerged from the native obscurity of their condition, possessed talents, and taste, and intelligence, which are little suspected to lurk in those humble retreats. His epistles to brother poets, in the rank of farmers and shopkeepers in the adjoining villages, — the existence of a book-society and debating-club among persons of that description, and many other incidental traits in his sketches of his youthful companions, — all contribute to show, that not only good sense, and enlightened morality, but literature, and talents for speculation, are far more generally diffused in society than is generally imagined; and that the delights and the benefits of these generous and humanising pursuits are by no means confined to those whom leisure and affluence have courted to their enjoyment. That much of this is peculiar to Scotland, and may be properly referred to our excellent institutions for parochial education, and to the natural sobriety and prudence of our nation, may certainly be allowed: but we have no doubt that there is a good deal of the same principle in England, and that the actual intelligence of the lower orders will be found, there also, very far to exceed the ordinary estimates of their superiors. It is pleasing to know that the sources of rational enjoyment are so widely disseminated; and, in a free country, it is comfortable to think that so great a proportion of the people is able to appreciate the advantages of its condition, and fit to be relied on in all emergencies where steadiness and intelligence may be required.

Our other remark is of a more limited application; and is addressed chiefly to the followers and patrons of that new school of poetry, against which we have thought it our duty to neglect no opportunity of testifying. Those gentlemen are outrageous for simplicity; and we beg leave to recommend to them the simplicity of Burns. He has copied the spoken language of passion and affection, with infinitely more fidelity than they have ever done, on all occasions which properly admitted of such adaptation: but he has not rejected the helps of elevated language and habitual associations; nor debased his composition by an affectation of babyish interjections, and all the puling expletives of an old nurserymaid's vocabulary. They may look long enough among his nervous and manly lines before they find any "Good lacks!" — "Dear hearts!" — or "As a body may say," in them; or any stuff about dancing daffodils and sister Emmelines. Let them think with what infinite contempt the powerful mind of Burns would have perused the story of Alice Fell and her duffle cloak, — of Andrew Jones and the half-crown, — or of little Dan without breeches, and his thievish grandfather. Let them contrast their own fantastical personages of hysterical schoolmasters and sententious leech-gatherers, with the authentic rustics of Burns's Cotter's Saturday Night, and his inimitable songs; and reflect on the different reception which these personifications have met with from the public. Though they will not be reclaimed from their puny affectation by the example of their learned predecessors, they may perhaps submit to be admonished by a self-taught and illiterate poet, who drew from Nature far more directly than they can do, and produced something so much liker the admired copies of the masters whom they have abjured.*

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* That many of the observations contained in the above able criticism on the poetical merits of Burns are unmeritedly severe, is too manifest; and perhaps no article in the Edinburgh Review, with the exception of the caustic and scurri-

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Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy; and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself even to our own time. It is true, the "nine days" have long since elapsed; and the very continuance of this clamour proves that Burns was no vulgar wonder. Accordingly, even in sober judgments, where, as years passed by, he has come to rest more and more exclusively on his own intrinsic merits, and may now be wellnigh shorn of that casual radiance, he appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century. Let it not be objected that he did little: He did much, if we consider where and how. If the work performed was small, we must remember that he had his very materials to discover; for the metal he worked in lay hid under the desert, where no eye but his had guessed its existence; and we may almost say that, with his own hand, he had to construct the tools for fashioning it. For he found himself in deepest obscurity, without help, without instruction, without model; or with models only of the meanest sort. An educated man stands, as it were, in the midst of a boundless arsenal and magazine, filled with all the weapons and engines which man's skill has been able to devise from the earliest time; and he works, accordingly, with a strength borrowed from all past ages. How different is *his* state who stands on the outside of that storehouse, and feels that its gates must be stormed, or remain for ever shut against him! His means are the commonest and rudest: the mere work done is no measure of his strength. A dwarf behind his steam-engine may remove mountains; but no dwarf will hew them down with the pickaxe; and he must be a Titan that hurls them abroad with his arms.

It is in this last shape that Burns presents himself. Born in an age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen, and in a condition the most disadvan-

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lous attack on the expanding genius of Byron, ever roused so strong and general a feeling of reprobation. It must be admitted that the writer, who is known to be Mr. Jeffrey, did not, in this instance, exhibit that lenity and tenderness to the errors of a great and original poet, which should characterise the mind of the true critic, peculiarly "formed to discern what is beautiful, and to seize eagerly on every touch of genius with the sympathy of kindred affection; and, in the secret consciousness of a congenial inspiration, to share, in some measure, the triumph of the artist." If, however, the reviewer was betrayed, in the haste of composition, into any expressions of reprehension which the faults of Burns did not merit, or which his unrivalled talents and the peculiarities of his situation in life should have softened, this harsh judgment on his character as a writer could not have arisen from a perverted taste, or from a malicious design to aggravate the defects of so highly gifted a being as the Ayrshire ploughman. Mr. Jeffrey has subsequently taken occasion to make a public acknowledgment of the severity of his infliction upon poor Burns; and, with a degree of magnanimity which reflects credit on his honourable mind, has adorned the pages of the Edinburgh Review with several beautiful and discriminating panegyrics on Scotland's poetical idol. (See further observations on this subject in the Preliminary Dissertation to this work.)

* Lockhart's Life of Burns. — Vol. xlviii. p. 270. December, 1828.

tageous, where his mind, if it acomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil, nay, of penury and desponding apprehension of the worst evils, and with no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Fergusson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty, he sinks not under all these impediments: through the fogs and darkness of that obscure region, his eagle eye discerns the true relations of the world and human life; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself to intellectual expertness. Impelled by the irrepressible movement of his inward spirit, he struggles forward into the general view, and with haughty modesty lays down before us, as the fruit of his labour, a gift, which Time has now pronounced imperishable. Add to all this, that his darksome drudging childhood and youth was by far the kindliest era of his whole life; and that he died in his thirty-seventh year: and then ask if it be strange that his poems are imperfect, and of small extent, or that his genius attained no mastery in its art. Alas, his sun shone as through a tropical tornado; and the pale Shadow of Death eclipsed it at noon! Shrouded in such baleful vapours, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendour, enlightening the world: but some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colours into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on, with wonder and tears!

We are anxious not to exaggerate; for it is exposition rather than admiration that our readers require of us here; and yet to avoid some tendency to that side is no easy matter. We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify. Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not so sure of this: but at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics. True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us. He was often advised to write a tragedy: time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of the deepest. We question whether the world has since witnessed so utterly sad a scene; whether Napoleon himself, left to brawl with Sir Hudson Lowe, and perish on his rock "amid the melancholy main," presented to the reflecting mind such a "spectacle of pity and fear," as did this intrinsically nobler, gentler, and perhaps greater soul, wasting itself away in hopeless struggle with base entanglements, which coiled closer and closer round him, till only Death opened him an outlet. Conquerors are a race with whom the world could well dispense; nor can the hard intellect, the unsympathising loftiness, and high but selfish enthusiasm of such persons, inspire us in general with any affection; at best, it may excite amazement; and their fall, like that of a pyramid, will be beheld with a certain sadness and awe. But a true poet, a man in whose heart resides some effluence of Wisdom, some tone of the "Eternal Melodies," is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: we see in him a freer, purer developement of whatever is noblest in ourselves; his life is a rich lesson to us, and we mourn his death, as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us.

Such a gift had Nature in her bounty bestowed on us in Robert Burns, but with queenlike indifference she cast it from her hand, like a thing of no moment; and it was defaced and torn asunder, as an idle bauble, before we recognised it. To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own was not given. Destiny — for so in our ignorance we must speak — his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him; and that spirit, which might

have soared, could it have but walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom, and died, we may almost say without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul; so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things! How his heart flows out in sympathy over universal Nature, and in her bleakest provinces discerns a beauty and meaning! The "Daisy" falls not unheeded under his ploughshare; nor the ruined nest of that "wee, cowering, timorous beastie," cast forth, after all its provident pains, to "thole the sleety dribble, and cranreuch cauld." The "hoar visage" of Winter delights him: he dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation; but the voice of the tempest becomes an anthem to his ears; he loves to walk in the sounding woods, for "it raises his thoughts to *Him that walketh on the wings of the wind.*" A true poet-soul, for it needs but to be struck, and the sound it yields will be music! But observe him chiefly as he mingles with his brother men. What warm, all-comprehending fellow-feeling, what trustful, boundless love, what generous exaggeration of the object loved! His rustic friend, his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, whom he prizes as the paragons of earth. The rough scenes of Scottish life, not seen by him in any Arcadian illusion, but in the rude contradiction — in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him: Poverty is indeed his companion, but Love also, and Courage; the simple feelings, the worth, the nobleness, that dwell under the straw roof, are dear and venerable to his heart: and thus over the lowest provinces of man's existence, he pours the glory of his own soul; and they rise, in shadow and sunshine, softened and brightened into a beauty which other eyes discern not in the highest. He has a just self-consciousness, which too often degenerates into pride; yet it is a noble pride, for defence, not for offence, no cold, suspicious feeling, but a frank and social one. The peasant poet bears himself, we might say like a king in exile: he is cast among the low, and feels himself equal to the highest; yet he claims no rank, that none may be disputed to him. The forward he can repel, the supercilious he can subdue; pretensions of wealth or ancestry are of no avail with him; there is a fire in that dark eye, under which the "insolence of condescension" cannot thrive. In his abasement, in his extreme need, he forgets not for a moment the majesty of poetry and manhood. And yet, far as he feels himself above common men, he wanders not apart from them, but mixes warmly in their interests; nay, throws himself into their arms; and, as it were, entreats them to love him. It is moving to see how, in his darkest despondency, this proud being still seeks relief from friendship; unbosoms himself, often to the unworthy; and, amid tears, strains to his glowing heart a heart that knows only the name of friendship. And yet he was "quick to learn;" a man of keen vision, before whom common disguises afforded no concealment. His understanding saw through the hollowness even of accomplished deceivers; but there was a generous credulity in his heart. And so did our peasant show himself among us; "a soul like an Æolian harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind, as it passed through them, changed itself into articulate melody." And this was he for whom the world found no fitter business than quarrelling with smugglers and vintners, computing excise dues upon tallow, and gauging alebarrels! In such toils was that mighty spirit sorrowfully wasted; and a hundred years may pass on, before another such is given us to waste.

All that remains of Burns, the writings he has left, seem to us, as we

hinted above, no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete; that wanted all things for completeness: culture, leisure, true effort, nay, even length of life. His poems are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions, poured forth with little premeditation, expressing, by such means as offered, the passion, opinion, or humour of the hour. Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of art such imperfect fragments, would be at once once unprofitable and unfair. Nevertheless, there is something in these poems, marred and defective as they are, which forbids the most fastidious student of poetry to pass them by. Some sort of enduring quality they must have: for, after fifty years of the wildest vicisitudes in poetic taste, they still continue to be read; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more extensively; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly; but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered, and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it. The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where the English tongue is spoken, are well worth enquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works. What is that excellence?

To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or prose; but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised: his *sincerity*, his indisputable air of truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities; no wiredrawn refinings, either in thought or feeling: the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience; it is the scenes he has lived and laboured amidst, that he describes: those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it, too, with such melody and modulation as he can; "in homely rustic jingle;" but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them; let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere*, is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition, of his own heart, and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him; but in either case, his words, if they are honest and sincere, will find some respouse within us; for, in spite of all casual varieties in outward rank, or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.

This may appear a very simple principle, and one which Burns had little merit in discovering. True, the discovery is easy enough: but the practical appliance is not easy; is indeed the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with, and which scarcely one in the hundred ever

fairly surmounts. A head too dull to discriminate the true from the false; a heart too dull to love the one at all risks, and to hate the other in spite of all temptations, are alike fatal to a writer. With either, or, as more commonly happens, with both, of these deficiencies, combine a love of distinction, a wish to be original, which is seldom wanting, and we have Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant, its elder brother, is of morals. How often does the one and the other front us, in poetry, as in life! Great poets themselves are not always free of this vice; nay, it is precisely on a certain sort and degree of greatness that it is most commonly ingrafted. A strong effort after excellence will sometimes solace itself with a mere shadow of success, and he who has much to unfold, will sometimes unfold it imperfectly. Byron, for instance, was no common man: yet if we examine his poetry with this view, we shall find it far enough from faultless. Generally, speaking we should say that it is not true. He refreshes us, not with the divine fountain, but too often with vulgar strong waters, stimulating indeed to the taste, but soon ending in dislike, or even nausea. Are his Harolds and Giaours, we would ask, real men, we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men? Do not these characters, does not the character of their author, which more or less shines through them all, rather appear a thing put on for the occasion; no natural or possible mode of being, but something intended to look much grander than nature? Surely, all these stormful agonies, this volcanic heroism, superhuman contempt, and moody desperation, with so much scowling, and teeth-gnashing, and other sulphurous humours, is more like the brawling of a player in some paltry tragedy, which is to last three hours, than the bearing of a man in the business of life, which is to last threescore and ten years. To our minds, there is a taint of this sort, something which we should call theatrical, false, and affected, in every one of these otherwise powerful peices. Perhaps *Don Juan*, especially the latter parts of it, is the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote; the only work where he showed himself, in any measure, as he was; and seemed so intent on his subject as, for moments, to forget himself. Yet Byron hated this vice; we believe, heartily detested it: nay, he had declared formal war against it in words. So difficult is it even for the strongest to make this primary attainment, which might seem the simplest of all: to *read its own consciousness without mistakes*, without errors involuntary or wilful! We recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer. In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

It is necessary, however, to mention, that it is to the poetry of Burns that we now allude; to those writings which he had time to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavour to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters and other fractions of prose composition by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubtless, there is not the same natural truth of style; but, on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted; a certain high-flown inflated tone; the stilting emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakspeare himself sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast! But even with regard to

these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first was, his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, though for most part he writes with singular force, and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the effort of a man to express something which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained; whom therefore he is either forearming himself against, or else unconsciously flattering, by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events, we should remember that these faults even in his Letters, are not the rule, but the exception. Whenever he writes, as one would ever wish to do, to trusted friends and on real interests, his style becomes simple, vigorous, expressive, sometimes even beautiful. His Letters to Mrs. Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

But we return to his poetry. In addition to its sincerity, it has another peculiar merit, which indeed is but a mode, or perhaps a means, of the foregoing. It displays itself in his choice of subjects, or rather in his indifference as to subjects, and the power he has of making all subjects interesting. The ordinary poet, like the ordinary man, is for ever seeking in external circumstances the help which can be found only in himself. In what is familiar and near at hand, he discerns no form or comeliness: home is not poetical, but prosaic. It is in some past, distant, conventional world, that poetry resides for him; were he there and not here, were he thus and not so, it would be well with him. Hence our innumerable host of rose-coloured novels and iron-mailed epics, with their locality not on the Earth, but somewhere nearer to the Moon. Hence our Virgins of the Sun, and our Knights of the Cross, malicious Saracens in turbans, and copper-coloured chiefs in wampum, and so many other truculent figures from the heroic times or the heroic climates, who on all hands swarm in our poetry. Peace be with them! But yet as a great moralist proposed preaching to the men of this century, so would we fain preach to the poets "a sermon on the duty of staying at home." Let them be sure that heroic ages and heroic climates can do little for them. That form of life has attraction for us, less because it is better or nobler than our own, than simply because it is different; and even this attraction must be of the most transient sort. For will not our own age, one day, be an ancient one; and have as quaint a costume as the rest, not contrasted with the rest, therefore, but ranked along with them in respect of quaintness? Does Homer interest us now, because he wrote of what passed out of his native Greece, and two centuries before he was born; or because he wrote of what passed in God's world, and in the heart of man, which is the same after thirty centuries? Let our poets look to this: is their feeling really finer, truer, and their vision deeper than that of other men, they have nothing to fear, even from the humblest subject; is it not so, — they have nothing to hope, but an ephemeral favour, even from the highest.

The poet, we cannot but think, can never have far to seek for a subject: the elements of his art are in him, and around him, on every hand; for him the ideal world is not remote from the actual, but under it and within it; nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it there. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place; for here too is man's existence, with its infinite longings and

small acquirings; its ever-thwarted, ever-renewed endeavours; its unspeakable aspirations; its fears and hopes that wander through eternity; and all the mystery of brightness and of gloom that it was ever made of in any age or climate, since man first began to live. Is there not the fifth act of a tragedy in every death-bed, though it were a peasant's, and a bed of heath? and are wooings and weddings obsolete, that there can be Comedy no longer? or are men suddenly grown wise, that Laughter must no longer shake his sides, but be cheated of his Farce? Man's life and nature is, as it was, and as it will ever be. But the poet must have an eye to read these things, and a heart to understand them; or they come and pass away before him in vain. He is a *vates*, a seer; a gift of vision has been given him. Has life no meanings for him, which another cannot equally decipher? then he is no poet, and Delphi itself will not make him one.

In this respect, Burns, though not perhaps absolutely a great poet, better manifests his capability, better proves the truth of his genius, than if he had, by his own strength, kept the whole Minerva Press going, to the end of his literary course. He shows himself at least a poet of Nature's own making; and Nature, after all, is still the grand agent in making poets. We often hear of this and the other external condition being requisite for the existence of a poet. Sometimes it is a certain sort of training; he must have studied certain things, studied for instance "the elder dramatists," and so learned a poetic language; as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart. At other times we are told, he must be bred in a certain rank, and must be on a confidential footing with the higher classes; because, above all other things, he must see the world. As to seeing the world, we apprehend this will cause him little difficulty, if he have but an eye to see it with. Without eyes, indeed, the task might be hard. But happily every poet is born *in* the world; and sees it, with or against his will, every day and every hour he lives. The mysterious workmanship of man's heart, the true light and the inscrutable darkness of man's destiny, reveal themselves not only in capital cities, and crowded saloons, but in every hut and hamlet where men have their abode. Nay, do not the elements of all human virtues, and all human vices; the passions at once of a Borgia and of a Luther, lie written, in stronger or fainter lines, in the consciousness of every individual bosom, that has practised honest self-examination? Truly, this same world may be seen in Mossgiel and Tarbolton, if we look well, as clearly as it ever came to light in Crockford's, or the Tuileries itself.

But sometimes still harder requisitions are laid on the poor aspirant to poetry; for it is hinted that he should have *been born* two centuries ago; inasmuch as poetry, soon after that date, vanished from the earth, and became no longer attainable by men! Such cobweb speculations have, now and then, overhung the field of literature; but they obstruct not the growth of any plant there: the Shakspeare, or the Burns, unconsciously, and merely as he walks onward, silently brushes them away. Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear? Why do we call him new and original, if *we* saw where his marble was lying, and what fabric he could rear from it? It is not the material but the workman that is wanting. It is not the dark *place* that hinders, but the dim *eye*. A Scottish peasant's life was the meanest and rudest of all lives, till Burns became a poet in it, and a poet of it; found it a *man*'s life, and therefore significant to men. A thousand battle-fields remain unsung; but the *Wounded Hare* has not perished without its memorial; a balm of mercy

yet breathes on us from its dumb agonies, because a poet was there. Our *Halloween* had passed and repassed, in rude awe and laughter, since the era of the Druids; but no Theocritus, till Burns, discerned in it the materials of a Scottish Idyl: neither was the *Holy Fair* any *Council of Trent* or Roman *Jubilee;* but nevertheless, *Superstition*, and *Hypocrisy*, and *Fun* having been propitious to him, in this man's hand it became a poem, instinct with satire, and genuine comic life. Let but the true poet be given us, we repeat it, place him where and how you will, and true poetry will not be wanting.

Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, as we have now attempted to describe it, a certain rugged sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written: a virtue as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry; it is redolent of natural life, and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him, and yet a sweet native gracefulness: he is tender, and he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see in him the gentleness, the trembling pity, of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardour, of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling; the high and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in their turns to his "lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit." And observe with what a prompt and eager force he grasps his subject, be it what it may! How he fixes, as it were, the full image of the matter in his eye; full and clear in every lineament; and catches the real type and essence of it, amid a thousand accidents and superficial circumstances, no one of which misleads him! Is it of reason; some truth to be discovered? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question; and speaks his verdict with an emphasis that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description; some visual object to be represented? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns: the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward, metre, so clear and definite a likeness! It seems a draughtsman working with a burned stick; and yet the burin of a Retsch is not more expressive or exact.

This clearness of sight we may call the foundation of all talent; for in fact, unless we *see* our object, how shall we know how to place or prize it, in our understanding, our imagination, our affections? Yet it is not in itself perhaps a very high excellence; but capable of being united indifferently with the strongest, or with ordinary, powers. Homer surpasses all men in this quality; but, strangely enough, at no great distance below him are Richardson and Defoe. It belongs, in truth, to what is called a lively mind; and gives no sure indication of the higher endowments that may exist along with it. In all the three cases we have mentioned, it is combined with great garrulity; their descriptions are detailed, ample, and lovingly exact; Homer's fire bursts through from time to time, as if by accident; but Defoe and Richardson have no fire. Burns, again, is not more distinguished by the clearness than by the impetuous force of his conceptions. Of the strength, the piercing emphasis, with which he thought, his emphasis of expression may give a humble but the readiest proof. Who ever uttered sharper sayings than his; words more memorable, now by their burning vehemence, now by their cool vigour and

laconic pith? A single phrase depicts a whole subject, a whole scene. Our Scottish forefathers in the battle-field struggled forward, he says, "*red-wat-shod;*" giving in this one word a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate for art!

In fact, one of the leading features in the mind of Burns is this vigour of his strictly intellectual perceptions. A resolute force is ever visible in his judgments, as in his feelings and volitions. Professor Stewart says of him with some surprise—"All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From this conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." But this, if we mistake not, is at all times the very essence of a truly poetical endowment. Poetry, except in such cases as that of Keats, where the whole consists in extreme sensibility, and a certain vague pervading tunefulness of nature, is no separate faculty, no organ which can be superadded to the rest, or disjoined from them; but rather the result of their general harmony and completion. The feelings, the gifts, that exist in the poet, are those that exist, with more or less developement, in every human soul: the imagination, which shudders at the hell of Dante, is the same faculty, weaker in degree, which called that picture into being. How does the poet speak to all men, with power, but by being still more a man than they? Shakspeare, it has been well observed, in the planning and completing of his tragedies, has shown an understanding, were it nothing more, which might have governed states, or indited a *Novum Organum.* What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judging; for it dwelt among the humblest objects, never saw philosophy, and never rose, except for short intervals, into the region of great ideas. Nevertheless, sufficient indication remains for us in his works; we discern the brawny movements of a gigantic though untutored strength, and can understand how, in conversation, his quick sure insight into men and things may, as much as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

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By far the most finished, complete, and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs.* It is here that, although through a small aperture, his light shines with the least obstruction; in its highest beauty, and pure sunny clearness. The reason may be, that Song is a brief and simple species of composition; and requires nothing so much for its perfection, as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart. The Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much as felt. We might write a long essay on the Songs of Burns; which we reckon by far the best that Britain has yet produced: for indeed since the era of Queen Elizabeth, we know not that, by any other hand, aught truly worth attention has been accomplished in this department. True, we have songs enough "by persons of quality;" we have tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals; many a rhymed "speech" in the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal Bishop, rich in sonorous words, and, for moral, dashed perhaps with some tint of a sentimental sensuality; all which many persons cease not from endeavouring to sing; though for most part, we fear, the music is but from the throat outwards, or at best from some region far enough short of the *soul;* not in which, but in a

certain inane Limbo of the fancy, or even in some vaporous debatable land on the outside of the nervous system, most of such madrigals and rhymed speeches seem to have originated. With the songs of Burns we must not name these things. Independently of the clear, manly, heart-felt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his songs are honest in another point of view; in form, as well as in spirit. They do not *affect* to be set to music, but they actually and in themselves are music; they have received their life, and fashioned themselves together, in the medium of harmony, as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested; not *said*, or spouted in rhetorical completeness and coherence; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in *warblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a song; and that no songs since the little careless catches, and, as it were, drops of song, which Shakspeare has here and there sprinkled over his plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, too, presupposes in general a corresponding force and truth of sentiment, and inward meaning. The songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality, than in the latter. With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture in his joy; he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest or slyest mirth; and yet he is sweet and soft, "sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear!" If we farther take into account the immense variety of his subjects; how, from the loud flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a peck o' Maut*, to the still, rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven;* from the glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne*, or the comic archness of *Duncan Gray*, to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, he has found a tone and words for every mood of man's heart, — it will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our song writers; for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him.

It is on his songs, as we believe, that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately be found to depend; nor, if our Fletcher's aphorism is true, shall we account this a small influence. "Let me make the songs of a people," said he, "and you shall make its laws." Surely, if ever any poet might have equalled himself with legislators, on this ground, it was Burns. His songs are already part of the mother-tongue not of Scotland only but of Britain, and of the millions that in all the ends of the earth speak a British language. In hut and hall, as the heart unfolds itself in the joy and woe of existence, the name, the voice, of that joy and that woe, is the name and voice which Burns has given them. Strictly speaking, perhaps, no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men, as this solitary and altogether private individual, with means apparently the humblest.

In another point of view, moreover, we incline to think that Burns's influence may have been considerable: we mean, as exerted specially on the literature of his country, at least on the literature of Scotland. Among the great changes which British, particularly Scottish, literature has undergone since that period, one of the greatest will be found to consist in its remarkable increase of nationality. Even the English writers most popular in Burns's time, were little distinguished for their literary patriotism, in this its best sense. A certain attenuated cosmopolitanism had, in good measure, taken place of the old insular home-feeling; literature was, as it were, without any local environment, was not nourished by

the affections which spring from a native soil. Our Grays and Glovers seemed to write almost as if *in vacuo;* the thing written bears no mark of place; it is not written so much for Englishmen, as for men; or rather, which is the inevitable result of this, for certain generalisations which philosophy termed men. Goldsmith is an exception: not so Johnson; the scene of his *Rambler* is little more English than that of his *Rasselas.* But if such was, in some degree, the case with England, it was, in the highest degree, the case with Scotland. In fact, our Scottish literature had, at that period, a very singular aspect; unexampled, so far as we know, except perhaps at Geneva, where the same state of matters appears still to continue. For a long period after Scotland became British, we had no literature: at the date when Addison and Steele were writing their *Spectators,* our good John Boston was writing, with the noblest intent, but alike in defiance of grammar and philosophy, his *Fourfold State of Man.* Then came the schisms in our national church, and the fiercer schisms in our body politic: theologic ink, and Jacobite blood, with gall enough in both cases, seemed to have blotted out the intellect of the country; however, it was only obscured, not obliterated. Lord Kames made nearly the first attempt, and a tolerably clumsy one, at writing English; and ere long Hume, Robertson, Smith, and a whole host of followers, attracted hither the eyes of all Europe. And yet in this brilliant resuscitation of our "fervid genius," there was nothing truly Scottish, nothing indigenous; except, perhaps, the natural impetuosity of intellect, which we sometimes claim, and are sometimes upbraided with, as a characteristic of our nation. It is curious to remark that Scotland, so full of writers, had no Scottish culture, nor indeed any English; our culture was almost exclusively French. It was by studying Racine and Voltaire, Batteux and Boileau, that Kames had trained himself to be a critic and philosopher; it was the light of Montesquieu and Mably that guided Robertson in his political speculations; Quesnay's lamp that kindled the lamp of Adam Smith. Hume was too rich a man to borrow; and perhaps he reacted on the French more than he was acted on by them; but neither had he aught to do with Scotland; Edinburgh, equally with La Flèche, was but the lodging and laboratory, in which he not so much morally *lived,* as metaphysically *investigated.* Never, perhaps, was there a class of writers, so clear and well-ordered, yet so totally destitute, to all appearance, of any patriotic affection, nay, of any human affection whatever. The French wits of the period were as unpatriotic; but their general deficiency in moral principle, not to say their avowed sensuality and unbelief in all virtue, strictly so called, render this accountable enough. We hope there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice; that our country may be dear to us without injury to our philosophy; that in loving and justly prizing all other lands, we may prize justly, and yet love before all others, our own stern motherland, and the venerable structure of social and moral life, which mind has through long ages been building up for us there. Surely there is nourishment for the better part of man's heart in all this: surely the roots, that have fixed themselves in the very core of man's being, may be so cultivated as to grow up not into briers, but into roses, in the field of his life! Our Scottish sages have no such propensities: the field of their life shows neither briers nor roses: but only a flat, continuous thrashing floor for logic, whereon all questions, from the "Doctrine of Rent," to the "Natural History of Religion," are thrashed and sifted with the same mechanical impartiality!

With Sir Walter Scott at the head of our literature, it cannot be denied

that much of this evil is past, or rapidly passing away: our chief literary men, whatever other faults they may have, no longer live among us like a French colony, or some knot of Propaganda missionaries; but like natural-born subjects of the soil, partaking and sympathising in all our attachments, humours, and habits. Our literature no longer grows in water, but in mould, and with the true racy virtues of the soil and climate. How much of this change may be due to Burns, or to any other individual, it might be difficult to estimate. Direct literary imitation of Burns was not to be looked for. But his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate from afar; and certainly in no heart did the love of country ever burn with a warmer glow than in that of Burns: "a tide of Scottish prejudice," as he modestly calls this deep and generous feeling, "had been poured along his veins; and he felt that it would boil there till the floodgates shut in eternal rest." It seemed to him, as if *he* could do so little for his country, and yet would so gladly have done all. One small province stood open for him; that of Scottish song, and how eagerly he entered on it; how devotedly he laboured there! In his most toilsome journeyings, this object never quits him; it is the little happy valley of his care-worn heart. In the gloom of his own affliction, he eagerly searches after some lonely brother of the muse, and rejoices to snatch one other name from the oblivion that was covering it! These were early feelings, and they abode with him to the end.

——"a wish, (I mind its power,)
A wish, that to my latest hour
Will strongly heave my breast;
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least.
The rough bur Thistle spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turn'd my weeding-clips aside,
And spared the symbol dear."

But to leave the mere literary character of Burns, which has already detained us too long, we cannot but think that the life he willed, and was fated to lead among his fellow men, is both more interesting and instructive than any of his written works. These poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed romance of his earthly existence; and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance. And this too, alas, was but a fragment! The plan of a mighty edifice had been sketched; some columns, porticoes, firm masses of building, stand completed; the rest more or less clearly indicated; with many a far-stretching tendency, which only studious and friendly eyes can now trace towards the purposed termination. For the work is broken off in the middle, almost in the beginning; and rises among us, beautiful and sad, at once unfinished and a ruin! If charitable judgment was necessary in estimating his poems, and justice required that the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it, must often be accepted for the fulfilment; much more is this the case in regard to his life, the sum and result of all his endeavours, where his difficulties came upon him not in detail only, but in mass; and so much has been left unaccomplished, nay, was mistaken, and altogether marred.

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He loved poetry warmly, and in his heart — could he but have loved it

purely, and with his whole undivided heart, it had been well. For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion; is itself Wisdom and Religion. But this also was denied him. His poetry is a stray vagrant gleam, which will not be extinguished within him, yet rises not to be the true light of his path, but is often a wildfire that misleads him. It was not necessary for Burns to be rich, to be, or to seem, "independent;" but *it was* necessary for him to be at one with his own heart; to place what was highest in his nature, highest also in his life; "to seek within himself for that consistency and sequence, which external events would for ever refuse him." He was born a poet; poetry was the celestial element of his being, and should have been the soul of his whole endeavours. Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: poverty, neglect, and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet; and he looked down alike on noble and slave, on prince and beggar, and all that wore the stamp of man, with clear recognition, with brotherly affection, with sympathy, with pity. Nay, we question whether for his culture as a poet, poverty, and much suffering for a season, were not absolutely advantageous. Great men, in looking back over their lives, have testified to that effect. "I would not for much," says Jean Paul, "that I had been born richer." And yet Paul's birth was poor enough; for, in another place, he adds:—"The prisoner's allowance is bread and water; and I had often only the latter." But the gold that is refined in the hottest furnace comes out the purest; or, as he has himself expressed it, "the canary-bird sings sweeter, the longer it has been trained in a darkened cage."

A man like Burns might have divided his hours between poetry and virtuous industry; industry which all true feeling sanctions, nay, prescribes, and which has a beauty, for that cause, beyond the pomp of thrones: but to divide his hours between poetry and rich men's banquets, was an ill-starred and inauspicious attempt. How could he be at ease at such banquets? What had he to do there, mingling his music with the coarse roar of altogether earthly voices, and brightening the thick smoke of intoxication with fire lent him from heaven? Was it his aim to *enjoy* life? to-morrow he must go drudge as an exciseman! We wonder not that Burns became moody, indignant, and at times an offender against certain rules of society; but rather that he did not grow utterly frantic, and run *a muck* against them all. How could a man, so falsely placed, by his own or others' fault, ever know contentment or peaceable diligence for an hour? What he did, under such perverse guidance, and what he forbore to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.

Doubtless there was a remedy for this perverseness: but not in others; only in himself; least of all in simple increase of wealth and worldly "respectability." We hope we have now heard enough about the efficacy of wealth for poetry, and to make poets happy. Nay, have we not seen another instance of it in these very days? Byron, a man of an endowment considerably less ethereal than that of Burns, is born in the rank not of a Scottish ploughman, but of an English peer: the highest worldly honours, the fairest worldly career, are his by inheritance; the richest harvest of fame he soon reaps, in another province, by his own hand. And what does all this avail him? Is he happy, is he good, is he true? Alas, he has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal; and soon feels that all this is but mounting to the house-top to reach the

stars! Like Burns, he is only a proud man; might like him have "purchased a pocket-copy of Milton to study the character of Satan;" for Satan also is Byron's grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model apparently of his conduct. As in Burns's case, too, the celestial element will not mingle with the clay of earth; both poet and man of the world he must be; vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration; he *cannot* serve God and Mammon. Byron, like Burns, is not happy; nay, he is the most wretched of all men. His life is falsely arranged; the fire that is in him is not a strong, still, central fire, warming into beauty the products of a world; but it is the mad fire of a volcano; and now — we look sadly into the ashes of a crater, which, ere long, will fill itself with snow!

Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher doctrine, a purer truth: they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it. They are in the camp of the unconverted. Yet not as high messengers of rigorous though benignant truth, but as soft flattering singers, and in pleasant fellowship will they live there: they are first adulated, then persecuted; they find no peace for themselves, but only death and the peace of the grave. We confess, it is not without a certain mournful awe that we view the fate of those noble souls, so richly gifted, yet ruined to so little purpose with all their gifts. It seems to us there is a stern moral taught in this piece of history — *twice* told us in our own time! Surely to men of like genius, if there be any such, it carries with it a lesson of deep impressive significance. Surely it would become such a man, furnished for the highest of all enterprises, that of being the Poet of his Age, to consider well what it is that he attempts, and in what spirit he attempts it. For the words of Milton are true in all times, and were never truer than in this: "He who would write heroic poems, must make his whole life a heroic poem." If he cannot first so make his life, then let him hasten from this arena; for neither its lofty glories, nor its fearful perils, are for him. Let him dwindle into a modish balladmonger; let him worship and be-sing the idols of the time, and the time will not fail to reward him — if, indeed, he can endure to live in that capacity! Byron and Burns could not live as idol priests, but the fire of their own hearts consumed them: and better it was for them that they could not; for it is not in the favour of the great, or of the small, but in a life of truth, and in the inexpugnable citadel of his own soul, that a Byron's or a Burns's strength must lie. Let the great stand aloof from him, or know how to reverence him. Beautiful is the union of wealth with favour and furtherance for literature; like the costliest flower-jar enclosing the loveliest amaranth. Yet let not the relation be mistaken. A true poet is not one whom they can hire by money or flattery to be a minister of their pleasures, their writer of occasional verses, their purveyor of table-wit; he cannot be their menial, he cannot even be their partisan. At the peril of both parties, let no such union be attempted! Will a courser of the sun work softly in the harness of a dray-horse? His hoofs are of fire, and his path is through the heavens, bringing light to all lands; will he lumber on mud highways, dragging ale for earthly appetites, from door to door?

But we must stop short in these considerations, which would lead us to boundless lengths. We had something to say on the public moral cha-

racter of Burns; but this also we must forbear. We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay, from doubting that he is less guilty than one of ten thousand. Tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the *Plebiscita* of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us even there less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust in its judgments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance:—It decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively but negatively, less on what is done right, than on what is, or is not, done wrong. Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay, the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured; and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them. Here lies the root of many a blind cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Roussseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged; and the pilot is, therefore, blameworthy; for he has not been all-wise and all-powerful; but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.

With our readers in general, with men of right feeling anywhere, we are not required to plead for Burns. In pitying admiration, he lies enshrined in all our hearts, in a far nobler mausoleum than that one of marble; neither will his works, even as they are, pass away from the memory of men. While the Shakspeares and Miltons roll on like mighty rivers through the country of Thought, bearing fleets of traffickers and assiduous pearl-fishers on their waves; this little Valclusa Fountain will also arrest our eye: for this also is of Nature's own and most cunning workmanship, bursts from the depths of the earth with a full-gushing current into the light of day; and often will the traveller turn aside to drink of its clear waters, and muse among its rocks and pines.*

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* The foregoing extracts form only a part of the beautiful essay from which they are taken. If not the most discriminating, it is certainly the most eloquent and impassioned tribute of praise ever bestowed on the intellectual character of Robert Burns. Compared with Mr. Jeffrey's criticism on the Scottish poet, it will appear too lavish in its encomiums, and in its style more dazzling than polished,—more ambitious than chaste,—more mystical than simple and pure. The northern critic may have censured without sufficient cause, and praised without cordiality; but it must be admitted, by every candid judge, that his review of Burns as a poet is written with all that vigour of thought and felicity of language for which the former editor of the Edinburgh Review is so justly celebrated. Amongst the many valuable dissertations on the genius of Burns which Lockhart's life of the poet elicited from the periodical press, there was one of surpassing talent published in Blackwood's Magazine. Professor Wilson received the credit of writing it. It is remarkable for strength, brilliancy, feeling, and enthusiasm,—qualities that are to be found in all the productions of the author of the "Isle of Palms."

LORD BYRON.*

If the finest poetry be that which leaves the deepest impression on the minds of its readers — and this is not the worst test of its excellence — Lord Byron, we think, must be allowed to take precedence of all his distinguished contemporaries. He has not the variety of Scott — nor the delicacy of Campbell — nor the absolute truth of Crabbe — nor the polished sparkling of Moore; but in force of diction, and inextinguishable energy of sentiment, he clearly surpasses them all. "Words that breathe, and thoughts that burn," are not merely the ornaments, but the common staple of his poetry; and he is not inspired or impressive only in some happy passages, but through the whole body and tissue of his composition. It was an unavoidable condition, perhaps, of this higher excellence, that his scene should be narrow, and his persons few. To compass such ends as he had in view, it was necessary to reject all ordinary agents, and all trivial combinations. He could not possibly be amusing, or ingenious, or playful; or hope to maintain the requisite pitch of interest by the recitation of sprightly adventures, or the opposition of common characters. To produce great effects, he felt that it was necessary to deal only with the greater passions — with the exaltations of a daring fancy, and the errors of a lofty intellect — with the pride, the terrors, and the agonies of strong emotion — the fire and air alone of our human elements.

In this respect, and in his general notion of the end and the elements of poetry, we have sometimes thought that his views fell more in with those of the Lake poets, than of any other party in the poetical commonwealth; and, in some of his later productions especially, it is impossible not to be struck with his occasional approaches to the style and manner of this class of writers. Lord Byron, however, it should be observed, like all other persons of a quick sense of beauty, and sure enough of their own originality to be in no fear of paltry imputations, is a great mimic of styles and manners, and a great borrower of external character. He and Mr. Scott are full of imitations of all the writers from whom they have ever derived gratification; and the two most original writers of the age might appear, to superficial observers, to be the most deeply indebted to their predecessors. In this particular instance, we have no fault to find with Lord Byron: for undoubtedly the finer passages of Wordsworth and Southey have in them wherewithal to give an impulse to the utmost ambition of rival genius; and their diction and manner of writing is frequently both striking and original. But we must say, that it would afford us still greater pleasure to find these tuneful gentlemen returning the compliment which Lord Byron has here paid to their talents, and forming themselves on the model rather of his imitations than of their own originals. In these imitations they will find that, though he is sometimes abundantly mystical, he never, or at least very rarely, indulges in absolute nonsense — never takes his lofty flights upon mean or ridiculous occasions — and, above all, never dilutes his strong conceptions and magnificent imaginations with a flood of oppressive verbosity. On the contrary, he is, of all living writers, the most concise and condensed; and, we would fain hope, may go far, by

* Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto iii. The Prisoner of Chillon, and other Poems. Vol. xxvii. p. 277. December, 1816.

his example, to redeem the great reproach of our modern literature — its intolerable prolixity and redundance. In his nervous and manly lines, we find no elaborate amplification of common sentiments — no ostentatious polishing of pretty expressions; and we really think that the brilliant success which has rewarded his disdain of these paltry artifices, should put to shame for ever that puling and self-admiring race, who can live through half a volume on the stock of a single thought, and expatiate over diverse fair quarto pages with the details of one tedious description. — In Lord Byron, on the contrary, we have a perpetual stream of thick-coming fancies — an eternal spring of fresh-blown images, which seem called into existence by the sudden flash of those glowing thoughts and overwhelming emotions, that struggle for expression through the whole flow of his poetry — and impart to a diction that is often abrupt and irregular, a force and a charm which seem frequently to realise all that is said of inspiration.

With all these undoubted claims to our admiration, however, it is impossible to deny that the noble author before us has still something to learn, and a good deal to correct. He is frequently abrupt and careless, and sometimes obscure. There are marks, occasionally, of effort and straining after an emphasis which is generally spontaneous;—and, above all, there is far too great a monotony in the moral colouring of his pictures, and too much repetition of the same sentiments and maxims. He delights too exclusively in the delineation of a certain morbid exaltation of character and of feeling,—a sort of demoniacal sublimity, not without some traits of the ruined archangel. He is haunted almost perpetually with the image of a being feeding and fed upon by violent passions, and the recollections of the catastrophes they have occasioned: and, though worn out by their past indulgence, unable to sustain the burden of an existence which they do not continue to animate—full of pride and revenge and obduracy—disdaining life and death, and mankind and himself —and trampling, in his scorn, not only upon the falsehood and formality of polished life, but upon its tame virtues and slavish devotion: yet envying, by fits, the selfish beings he despises, and melting into mere softness and compassion when the helplessness of childhood or the frailty of woman make an appeal to his generosity. Such is the person with whom we are called upon almost exclusively to sympathise in all the greater productions of this distinguished writer: —in Childe Harold—in the Corsair—in Lara—in the siege of Corinth—in Parisina, and in most of the smaller pieces.

It is impossible to represent such a character better than Lord Byron has done in all these productions,—or indeed to represent any thing more terrible in its anger, or more attractive in its relenting. In point of effect, we readily admit, that no one character can be more poetical or impressive:—but it is really too much to find the scene perpetually filled by one character—not only in all the acts, but in all the different pieces; —and, grand and impressive as it is, we feel at last that these very qualities make some relief more indispensable, and oppress the spirits of ordinary mortals with too deep an impression of awe and repulsion. There is too much guilt in short, and too much gloom, in the leading character;—and though it be a fine thing to gaze, now and then, on stormy seas, and thunder-shaken mountains, we should prefer passing our days in sheltered valleys, and by the murmur of calmer waters. We are aware that these metaphors may be turned against us—and that, without metaphor, it may be said that men do not *pass their days* in reading

poetry,—and that, as they may look into Lord Byron only about as often as they look abroad upon tempests, they have no more reason to complain of him for being grand and gloomy, than to complain of the same qualities in the glaciers and volcanoes which they go so far to visit. Painters have often gained great reputation by their representations of tigers and other ferocious animals, or of caverns and banditti,—and poets should be allowed, without reproach, to indulge in analogous exercises. We are far from thinking that there is no weight in these considerations; and feel how plausibly it may be said, that we have no better reason for a great part of our complaint, than that an author, to whom we are already very greatly indebted, has chosen rather to please himself than us in the use he makes of his talents. This, no doubt, seems both unreasonable and ungrateful; but it is nevertheless true, that a public benefactor becomes a debtor to the public; and is, in some degree, responsible for the employment of those gifts which seem to be conferred upon him, not merely for his own delight, but for the delight, and improvement of his fellows through all generations. Independent of this, however, we think there is a reply to the apology. A great living poet is not like a distant volcano, or an occasional tempest. He is a volcano in the heart of our land, and a cloud that hangs over our dwellings; and we have some cause to complain, if, instead of genial warmth and grateful shade, he darkens and inflames our atmosphere with perpetual explosions of fiery torrents and pitchy vapours. Lord Byron's poetry, in short, is too attractive and too famous to lie dormant or inoperative; and therefore, if it produce any painful or pernicious effects, there will be murmurs, and ought to be suggestions of alteration. Now, though an artist may draw fighting tigers and hungry lions in as lively and natural a way as he can, without giving any encouragement to human ferocity, or even much alarm to human fear, the case is somewhat different, when a poet represents men with tiger-like dispositions—and yet more so, when he exhausts the resources of his genius to make this terrible being interesting and attractive, and to represent all the lofty virtues as the natural allies of their ferocity. It is still worse when he proceeds to show, that all these precious gifts of dauntless courage, strong affection, and high imagination, are not only akin to guilt, but the parents of misery;—and that those only have any chance of tranquillity or happiness in this world, whom it is the object of his poetry to make us shun and despise.

These, it appears to us, are not merely errors in taste, but perversions of morality; and, as a great poet is necessarily a Moral Teacher, and gives forth his ethical lessons, in general, with far more effect and authority than any of his graver brethren, he is peculiarly liable to the censures reserved for those who turn the means of improvement to purposes of corruption.

It may no doubt be said, that poetry in general tends less to the useful than the splendid qualities of our nature — that a character poetically good has long been distinguished from one that is morally so—and that, ever since the time of Achilles, our sympathies, on such occasions, have been chiefly engrossed by persons whose deportment is by no means exemplary, and who in many points approach to the temperament of Lord Byron's ideal hero. There is some truth in this suggestion also. But other poets, in the *first* place, do not allow their favourites so outrageous a monopoly of the glory and interest of the piece—and sin less therefore against the laws either of poetical or distributive justice. In the *second* place, their heroes are neither so bad nor so good

as Lord Byron's — and do not indeed very much exceed the standard of truth and nature in either of the extremes. His, however, are as monstrous and unnatural as centaurs and hippogriffs — and must ever figure in the eye of sober reason as so many bright and hateful impossibilities. But the most important distinction is, that the other poets who deal in peccant heroes, neither feel nor express that ardent affection for them, which is visible in the whole of this author's delineations, but merely make use of them as necessary agents in the extraordinary adventures they have to detail, and persons whose mingled vices and virtues are requisite to bring about the catastrophe of their story. In Lord Byron, however, the interest of the story, where there happens to be one, which is not always the case, is uniformly postponed to that of the character itself — into which he enters so deeply, and with so extraordinary a fondness, that he generally continues to speak in its language, after it has been dismissed from the stage; and to inculcate, on his own authority, the same sentiments which had been previously recommended by its example. We do not consider it as unfair, therefore, to say that Lord Byron appears to us to be the zealous apostle of a certain fierce and magnificent misanthropy, which has already saddened his poetry with too deep a shade, and not only led to a great misapplication of great talents, but contributed to render popular some very false estimates of the constituents of human happiness and merit. It is irksome, however, to dwell upon observations so general — and we shall probably have better means of illustrating these remarks, if they are really well founded, when we come to speak of the particular publications by which they have been suggested.

We had the good fortune, we believe, to be among the first who proclaimed the rising of a new luminary, on the appearance of Childe Harold on the poetical horizon, — and we pursued his course with due attention through several of the constellations. If we have lately omitted to record his progress with the same accuracy, it is by no means because we have regarded it with more indifference, or supposed that it would be less interesting to the public — but because it was so extremely conspicuous as no longer to require the notices of an official observer. In general, we do not think it necessary, nor indeed quite fair, to oppress our readers with an account of works, which are as well known to them as to ourselves, or a repetition of sentiments in which all the world is agreed. — Wherever a work, therefore, is very popular, and where the general opinion of its merits appears to be substantially right, we think ourselves at liberty to leave it out of our chronicle, without incurring the censure of neglect or inattention. A very rigorous application of this maxim might have saved our readers the trouble of reading what we now write; and, to confess the truth, we write it rather to gratify ourselves than with the hope of giving them much information. At the same time, some short notice of the progress of such a writer ought perhaps to appear in his contemporary journals, as a tribute due to his eminence; and a zealous critic can scarcely set about examining the merits of any work, or the nature of its reception by the public, without speedily discovering very urgent cause for his admonitions both to the author and his admirers.*

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* The abstract of the poems, and the extracts which follow, I am obliged to reject, though the remarks of the reviewer on the several passages display an

The most considerable of Lord Byron's most recent publications, is the Third Canto of Childe Harold, a work which has the disadvantage of all continuations in admitting of little absolute novelty in the plan of the work, or the cast of its character; and must, besides, remind all Lord Byron's readers of the extraordinary effect produced by the sudden blazing forth of his genius upon their first introduction to that title. In spite of all this, however, we are persuaded that this Third Part of the poem will not be pronounced inferior to either of the former; and, we think, will probably be ranked above them by those who have been most deligthed with the whole. The great success of this singular production, indeed, has always appeared to us an extraordinary proof of its merits; for, with all its genius, it does not belong to a sort of poetry that rises easily to popularity. It has no story or action—very little variety of character—and a great deal of reasoning and reflection of no very attractive tenor. It is substantially a contemplative and ethical work, diversified with fine description, and adorned or overshaded by one emphatic person, who is sometimes the author, and sometimes the object, of the reflections on which the interest is chiefly rested. It required, no doubt, great force of writing, and a decided tone of originality, to recommend a performance of this sort so powerfully as this has been recommended to public notice and admiration—and those high characteristics belong perhaps still more eminently to the part that is now before us, than to any of the former. There is the same stern and lofty disdain of mankind, and their ordinary pursuits and enjoyments, with the same bright gaze on Nature, and the same magic power of giving interest and effect to her delineations—but mixed up, we think with deeper and more matured reflections, and a more intense sensibility to all that is grand or lovely in the external world. Harold, in short, is somewhat older since he last appeared upon the scene—and while the vigour of his intellect has been confirmed, and his confidence in his own opinions increased, his mind has also become more sensitive; and his misanthropy, thus softened over by habits of calmer contemplation, appears less active and impatient, even although more deely rooted, than before. Undoubtedly the finest parts of the poem before us, are those which thus embody the weight of his moral sentiments, or disclose the lofty sympathy which binds the despiser of Man to the glorious aspects of Nature. It is in these, we think, that the great attractions of the work consist and the strength of the author's genius is seen. The narrative and description are of far inferior interest. With reference to the sentiments and opinions, however, which thus give its distinguishing character to the piece, we must say that it seems no longer possible to ascribe them to the ideal person whose name it bears, or to any other than the author himself. Lord Byron, we think, has formerly complained of those who identified him with his hero, or supposed that Harold was but the expositor of his own feelings and opinions;—and in noticing the former portions of the work, we thought it unbecoming to give any countenance to such a supposition. In this last part, however, it is really impracticable to distinguish them. Not only do the author and his hero travel and reflect together; but, in truth, we scarcely ever

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originality of conception, a richness of imagination, and a mastery over language, which no other modern critic possesses in so eminent a degree as Mr. Jeffrey. I have given, without abridgment, the reviewer's opinion of the third Canto of Childe Harold, and his reasons for dissenting from some of the sentiments so forcibly expressed by the noble poet in his splendid apostrophe to Napoleon.

have any notice to which of them the sentiments so energetically expressed are to be ascribed; and in those which are unequivocally given as those of the noble author himself, there is the very same tone of misanthropy, sadness, and scorn, which we were formerly willing to regard as a part of the assumed costume of the Childe. We are far from supposing, indeed, that Lord Byron would disavow any of these sentiments; and though there are some which we must ever think it most unfortunate to entertain, and others which it appears improper to have published, the greater part are admirable, and cannot be perused without emotion even by those to whom they may appear erroneous.

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There is an apostrophe to Napoleon, graduating into a series of general reflections, expressed with infinite beauty and earnestness, and illustrated by another cluster of magical images;—but breathing the very essence of misanthropical disdain, and embodying opinions which we conceive not to be less erroneous than revolting. After noticing the strange combination of grandeur and littleness which seemed to form the character of that eminent individual, the author proceeds —

" Yet well thy soul hath brook'd the turning tide
With that untaught innate philosophy,
Which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride,
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy.
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled
With a sedate and all-enduring eye;—
When Fortune fled her spoil'd and favourite child,
He stood unbow'd beneath the ills upon him piled.

" Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them
Ambition steel'd thee on too far to show
That just habitual scorn which could contemn
Men and their thoughts; 'twas wise to feel, not so
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use
Till they were turn'd unto thine overthrow:
'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;
So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

" But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire
And motion of the soul which will not dwell
In its own narrow being, but aspire
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

" This makes the madmen who have made men mad
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,
And are themselves the fools to those they fool;
Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings
Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school
Which would unteach mankind the lust to shine or rule:

" Their breath is agitation, and their life
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last;
And yet so nursed and bigoted to strife,
That should their days, surviving perils past,
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
With sorrow and supineness, and so die;
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste
With its own flickering, or a sword laid by,
Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

" He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;
He who *surpasses* or *subdues* mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.
Though high *above* the sun of glory glow,
And far *beneath* the earth and ocean spread,
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head,
And thus reward the toils which to those summits led."

This is splendidly written, no doubt—but we trust it is not true;—and as it is delivered with much more than poetical earnestness, and recurs, indeed, in other forms in various parts of the volume, we must really be allowed to enter our dissent somewhat at large. With regard to conquerors, we wish with all our hearts that the case were as the noble author represents it: but we greatly fear they are neither half so unhappy, nor half so much hated, as they should be. On the contrary, it seems plain enough that they are very commonly idolised and admired, even by those on whom they trample; and we suspect, moreover, that in general they pass their time rather agreeably, and derive considerable satisfaction from the ruin and desolation of the world. From Macedonia's Madman to the Swede, from Nimrod to Bonaparte, the hunters of men have pursued their sport with as much gaiety, and as little remorse, as the hunters of other animals; and have lived as cheerily in their days of action, and as comfortably in their repose, as the followers of better pursuits. For this and for the fame which they have generally enjoyed, they are obviously indebted to the great interests connected with their employment, and the mental excitement which belongs to its hopes and hazards. It would be strange, therefore, if the other active but more innocent spirits whom Lord Byron has here placed in the same predicament, and who share all their sources of enjoyment, without the guilt and the hardness which they cannot fail of contracting, should be more miserable or more unfriended than those splendid curses of their kind—and it would be *passing strange*, and pitiful, if the most precious gifts of Providence should produce only unhappiness, and mankind regard with hostility their greatest benefactors. We do not believe in any such prodigies. Great vanity and ambition may indeed lead to feverish and restless efforts—to jealousies, to hate and to mortification—but these are only their effects when united to inferior abilities. It is not those, in short, who actually surpass mankind, that are unhappy, but those who struggle in vain to surpass them; and this moody temper, which eats into itself from within, and provokes fair and unfair opposition from without, is generally the result of pretensions which outgo the merits by which they are supported—and disappointments, that may be clearly traced, not to the excess of genius, but its defect.

It will be found, we believe, accordingly, that the master spirits of their age have always escaped the unhappiness which is here supposed to be the inevitable lot of extraordinary talents; and that this strange tax upon genius has only been levied upon those who held the secondary shares of it. Men of truly great powers of mind have generally been cheerful, social, and indulgent;—while a tendency to sentimental whining, or fierce intolerance, may be ranked among the surest symptoms of little souls and inferior intellects. In the whole list of our English poets, we can only remember Shenstone and Savage—two, certainly, of the lowest —who were querulous and discontented. Cowley, indeed, used to call himself melancholy;—but he was full of conceits and affectations, and has nothing to make us proud of him. Shakspeare, the greatest of them all, was evidently of a free and joyous temperament;—and so was Chaucer, their common master. The same disposition appears to have predominated in Fletcher, Jonson, and their great contemporaries. The genius of Milton partook something of the austerity of the party to which he belonged, and of the controversies in which he was involved; but even when fallen on evil days and evil tongues, his spirit seems to have retained its serenity as well as its dignity;—and in his private life, as well as in his poetry, the majesty of a high character is tempered with great sweetness and practical wisdom. In the succeeding age, our poets were but too gay; and though we forbear to speak of living authors, we know enough of them to say with confidence, that to be miserable or to be hated is not now, any more than heretofore, the common lot of those who excel.

If this, however, be the case with poets, confessedly the most irritable and fantastic of all men of genius—and of poets, too, bred and born in the gloomy climate of England, it is not likely that those who have surpassed their fellows in other ways, or in other regions, have been more distinguished for unhappiness. Were Socrates and Plato, the greatest philosophers of antiquity, remarkable for unsocial or gloomy tempers?—was Bacon, the greatest in modern times?—was Sir Thomas More—or Erasmus—or Hume—or Voltaire?—was Newton—or Fénélon?—was Henry IV., the paragon of kings and conquerors?—was Fox, the most ardent, and, in the vulgar sense, the least successful, of statesmen? These, and men like these, are undoubtedly the lights and the boast of the world. Yet there was no alloy of misanthropy or gloom in their genius. They did not disdain the men they had surpassed; and neither feared nor experienced their hostility. Some detractors they might have, from envy or misapprehension; but, beyond all doubt, the prevailing sentiments in respect to them have always been those of gratitude and admiration; and the error of public judgment, where it has erred, has much oftener been to overrate than to undervalue the merits of those who had claims on their good opinion. On the whole, we are far from thinking that eminent men are happier than those who glide through life in peaceful obscurity; but it is their eminence, and the consequences of it, rather than the mental superiority by which it is obtained, that interferes with their enjoyment. Distinction, however won, usually leads to a passion for more distinction; and is apt to engage us in laborious efforts and anxious undertakings: and those, even when successful, seldom repay, in our judgment at least, the ease, the leisure and tranquillity, of which they require the sacrifice. But it really passes our imagination to conceive, that the very highest degrees of intellectual vigour, or fancy, or sensibility,

should of themselves be productive either of unhappiness or general dislike.*

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Beautiful as this poetry is, it is a relief at last to close the volume. We cannot maintain our accustomed tone of levity, or even speak like calm literary judges, in the midst of these agonising traces of a wounded and distempered spirit. Even our admiration is at last swallowed up in a most painful feeling of pity and of wonder. It is impossible to mistake these for fictitious sorrows, conjured up for the purpose of poetical effect. There is a dreadful tone of sincerity, and an energy that cannot be counterfeited, in the expression of wretchedness and alienation from human kind, which occurs in every page of this publication; and as the author has at last spoken out in his own person, and unbosomed his griefs a great deal too freely to his readers, the offence now would be, to entertain a doubt of their reality. We certainly have no hope of preaching him into philanthropy and cheerfulness; but it is impossible not to mourn over such a catastrophe of such a mind, or to see the prodigal gifts of Nature, Fortune, and Fame, thus turned to bitterness, without an oppressive feeling of impatience, mortification, and surprise. Where there are such elements, however, it is equally impossible to despair that they may yet enter into happier combinations,—or not to hope that "this puissant spirit"

"yet shall reascend,
Self-raised, and repossess its native seat."

ESTIMATE OF LORD BYRON'S CHARACTER AS A DRAMATIC POET.†

It must be a more difficult thing to write a good play—or even a good dramatic poem—than we had imagined. Not that we should, *a priori*, have imagined it to be very easy; but it is impossible not to be struck with the fact, that, in comparatively rude times, when the resources of the art had been less carefully considered, and Poetry certainly had not collected all her materials, success seems to have been more frequently and far more easily obtained. From the middle of Elizabeth's reign till the end of James's, the drama formed by far the most brilliant and beautiful part of our poetry,—and, indeed, of our literature in general. From that period to the Revolution, it lost a part of its splendour and originality; but still continued to occupy the most conspicuous and considerable place in our literary annals. For the last century, it has been quite otherwise—our poetry has ceased almost entirely to be dramatic; and though

* The only critique on the poetry of Byron that can be compared with this brilliant encomium on his genius, is the review of the third canto of Childe Harold in No. xxxi. of the Quarterly Review. It was written by Sir Walter Scott, and has been since reprinted in his Miscellaneous Works. Is there not something truly delightful in the exhibition thus afforded of one distinguished poet manifesting a generous desire to increase, by his cordial and disinterested praise, the fame of his rival in the same honourable field of competition?

† Sardanapalus. A Tragedy, &c. &c.—Vol. xxxvi. p. 413. February, 1822.

men of great name and great talent have occasionally adventured into this once fertile field, they have reaped no laurels, and left no trophies behind them. The genius of Dryden appears nowhere to so little advantage as in his tragedies; and the contrast is truly humiliating, when, in a presumptuous attempt to heighten the colouring or enrich the simplicity of Shakspeare, he bedaubs with obscenity, or deforms with rant, the genuine passion and pofligacy of Antony and Cleopatra; or intrudes on the enchanted solitude of Prospero and his daughter, with the tones of worldly gallantry, or the caricatures of affected simplicity. Otway, with the sweet and mellow diction of the former age, had none of its force, variety, or invention. Its decaying fires burst forth in some strong and irregular flashes, in the disorderly scenes of Lee; and sunk at last in the ashes and scarcely glowing embers of Rowe.

Since his time—till very lately—the school of our ancient dramatists has been deserted: and we can scarcely say that any new one has been established. Instead of the irregular and comprehensive plot—the rich discursive dialogue—the ramblings of fancy—the magic creations of poetry—the rapid succession of incidents and characters—the soft, flexible and ever-varying diction—and the flowing, continuous, and easy versification which characterised those masters of the golden time, we had tame, formal, elaborate, and stately compositions—meagre stories—few personages—characters decorous and consistent, but without nature or spirit—a guarded, timid, classical diction—ingenious and methodical disquisitions—turgid or sententious declamations—and a solemn and monotonous strain of versification. Nor can this be ascribed, even plausibly, to any decay of genius among us; for the most remarkable failures have fallen on the highest talents. We have already hinted at the miscarriages of Dryden. The exquisite taste and fine observation of Addison produced only the solemn mawkishness of Cato. The beautiful fancy and generous affections of Thomson were chilled and withered as soon as he touched the verge of the Drama, where his name is associated with a mass of verbose puerility, which it is difficult to conceive could ever have proceeded from the author of the Seasons and the Castle of Indolence. Even the mighty intellect, the eloquent morality and lofty diction, of Johnson, which gave too tragic and magnificent a tone to his ordinary discourse, failed altogether to support him in his attempt to write actual tragedy; and Irene is not only unworthy of the imitator of Juvenal and the author of Rasselas and the Lives of the Poets, but is absolutely, and in itself, nothing better than a tissue of wearisome and unimpassioned declamations. We have named the most celebrated names in our literature, since the decline of the drama, almost to our own days; and if *they* have neither lent any new honours to the stage, nor borrowed any from it, it is needless to say that those who adventured with weaker powers had no better fortune. The Mourning Bride of Congreve, the Revenge of Young, and the Douglas of Home (we cannot add the Mysterious Mother of Walpole—even to please Lord Byron), are almost the only tragedies of the last age that are familiar to the present; and they are evidently the works of a feebler and more effeminate generation—indicating, as much by their exaggerations as by their timidity, their own consciousness of inferiority to their great predecessors—whom they affected, however, not to imitate, but to supplant.

But the native taste of our people was not thus to be seduced and perverted: and when the wits of Queen Anne's time had lost the authority of living authors, it asserted itself by a fond recurrence to its original

standards, and a resolute neglect of the more regular and elaborate dramas by which they had been succeeded. Shakspeare, whom it had been the fashion to decry and even ridicule, as the poet of a rude and barbarous age *, was reinstated in his old supremacy: and when his legitimate progency could no longer be found at home, his spurious issue were hailed with rapture from foreign countries, and invited and welcomed with the most eager enthusiasm on their arrival. The German imitations of Schiller and Kotzebue, caricatured and distorted as they were by the aberrations of a vulgar and vitiated taste, had still so much of the raciness and vigour of the old English drama, from which they were avowedly derived, that they instantly became more popular in England than any thing that her own artists had recently produced; and served still more effectually to recall our affections to their native and legitimate rulers. Then followed republications of Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ford, and their contemporaries — and a host of new tragedies, all written in avowed and elaborate imitation of the ancient models. Miss Baillie, we rather think, had the merit of leading the way in this return to our old allegiance — and then came a volume of plays by Mr. Chenevix, and a succession of single plays, all of considerable merit, from Mr. Coleridge, Mr. Maturin, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Cornwall, and Mr. Milman. The first and the last of these names are the most likely to be remembered; but none of them,we fear, will ever be ranked with the older worthies; nor is it conceivable that any age should ever class them together.

We do not mean, however, altogether to deny, that there may be some illusion in our habitual feelings as to the merits of the great originals — consecrated, as they are, in our imaginations, by early admiration, and associated, as all their peculiarities, and the mere accidents and oddities of their diction, now are, with the recollection of their intrinsic excellences. It is owing to this, we suppose, that we can scarcely venture to ask ourselves steadily, and without an inward startling and feeling of alarm, what reception one of Shakspeare's irregular plays — The Tempest, for example, or the Midsummer Night's Dream — would be likely to meet with, if it were *now* to appear for the first time, without name, notice, or preparation? Nor can we pursue the hazardous supposition through all the possibilities to which it invites us, without something like a sense of impiety and profanation. Yet, though some little superstition may mingle with our faith, we must still believe it to be the true one. Though time may have hallowed many things that were at first but common, and accidental associations imparted a charm to much that was in itself indifferent, we cannot but believe that there was an original sanctity which time only matured and extended — and an inherent charm, from which the association derived all its power. And when we look candidly

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* It is not a little remarkable to find such a man as Goldsmith joining in this pitiful sneer. In his Vicar of Wakefield, he constantly represents his famous town ladies, Miss Carolina Amelia Wilhelmina Skeggs, and the other, as discoursing about "high life, *Shakspeare*, and the musical glasses!" — And, in a more serious passage, he introduces a player as astonishing the Vicar, by informing him that "Dryden and Rowe's manner were quite out of fashion — our taste has gone back a whole century; Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and, above all, the *plays of Shakspeare*, are the only things that go down." "How!" says the Vicar, "is it possible that the present age can be pleased with *that antiquated dialect*, that *obsolete humour*, and those *overcharged characters*, which abound in the works you mention?" No writer of name, who was not aiming at a paradox, would venture to say this now.

and calmly to the works of our early dramatists, it is impossible, we think, to dispute, that, after criticism has done its worst on them — after all deductions for impossible plots and fantastical characters, unaccountable forms of speech and occasional extravagance, indelicacy and horrors — there is a facility and richness about them, both of thought and of diction — a force of invention, and a depth of sagacity — an originality of conception, and a play of fancy — a nakedness and energy of passion, and, above all, a copiousness of imagery, and a sweetness and flexibility of verse, which is altogether unrivalled, in earlier or in later times, — and places them, in our estimation, in the very highest and foremost place among ancient or modern poets.

It is in these particulars that the inferiority of their recent imitators is most apparent — in the want of ease and variety — originality and grace. There is, in all their attempts, whatever may be their other merits or defects, an air of anxiety and labour — and indications, by far too visible, at once of timidity and ambition. This may arise, in part, from the fact of their being, too obviously and consciously, imitators. They do not aspire so much to rival the genius of their originals as to copy their manner. They do not write as *they* would have written in the present day, but as they imagine they themselves would have written two hundred years ago. They revive the antique phraseology, repeat the venerable oaths, and emulate the quaint familiarities of that classical period — and wonder that they are not mistaken for new incarnations of its departed poets! One great cause why they are not, is, that they speak an unnatural dialect, and are constrained by a masquerade habit; in neither of which it is possible to display that freedom, and those delicate traits of character, which are the life of the drama, and were among the chief merits of those who once exalted it so highly. Another bad effect of imitation, and especially of the imitation of unequal and irregular models in a critical age, is, that nothing is thought fit to be copied but the exquisite and shining passages; — from which it results, in the *first* place, that all our rivalry is reserved for occasions in which its success is most hopeless; and, in the *second* place, that instances, even of occasional success, want their proper grace and effect, by being deprived of the relief, shading and preparation, which they would naturally have received in a less fastidious composition; and, instead of the warm and native and ever-varying graces of a spontaneous effusion, the work acquires the false and feeble brilliancy of a prize essay in a foreign tongue — a collection of splendid patches of different texture and pattern.

At the bottom of all this — and perhaps as its most efficient cause — there lurks, we suspect, an unreasonable and undue dread of criticism; — not the deliberate and indulgent criticism which we exercise rather for the encouragement of talent than its warning, — but the vigilant and paltry derision which is perpetually striring in all idle societies, and but too continually present to the spirits of all who aspire to its notice. There is nothing so certain, we take it, as that those who are the most alert in discovering the faults of a work of genius are the least touched with its beauties. Those who admire and enjoy fine poetry, in short, are quite a different class of persons from those who find out its flaws and defects — who are sharp at detecting a plagiarism or a grammatical inaccuracy, and laudably industrious in bringing to light an obscure passage— sneering at an exaggerated one — or wondering at the meaning of some piece of excessive simplicity. It is in vain to expect the praises of such people, for they never praise; and it is truly very little worth while to

disarm their censure. It is only the praises of the real lovers of poetry that ever give it fame or popularity — and these are little affected by the cavils of the fastidious. Yet the genius of most modern writers seems to be rebuked under that of those pragmatical and insignificant censors. They are so much afraid of faults, that they will scarcely venture upon beauties; and seem more anxious in general to be *safe*, than original. They dare not indulge in a florid and magnificent way of writing, for fear of being charged with bombast by the cold-blooded and malignant. They must not be tender, lest they should be laughed at for puling and whining; nor discursive and fanciful, like their great predecessors, under pain of being held out to derision as ingenious gentlemen who have dreamed that the gods have made them poetical!

Thus, the dread of ridicule, which they have ever before their eyes, represses all the emotions, on the expression of which their success entirely depends; and, in order to escape the blame of those to whom they can give no pleasure, and through whom they can gain no fame, they throw away their best chance of pleasing those who are capable of relishing their excellences, and on whose admiration alone their reputation must at all events be founded. There is a great want of magnanimity, we think, as well as of wisdom, in this sensitiveness to blame; and we are convinced that no modern author will ever write with the grace and vigour of the older ones, who does not write with some portion of their fearlessness and indifference to censure. *Courage*, in short, is at least as necessary as genius to the success of a work of imagination; since, without this, it is impossible to attain that freedom and self-possession, without which no talents can ever have fair play, and, far less, that inward confidence and exaltation of spirit which must accompany all the higher acts of the understanding. The earlier writers had probably less occasion for courage to secure them these advantages; as the public was far less critical in their day, and much more prone to admiration than to derision; but we can still trace in their writings the indications both of a proud consciousness of their own powers and privileges, and of a brave contempt for the cavils to which they might expose themselves. In our own times, we know but one writer who is emancipated from this slavish awe of vulgar detraction — this petty timidity about being detected in blunders and faults; and that is the illustrious author of Waverley and the other novels, that have made an era in our literature as remarkable, and as likely to be remembered, as any which can yet be traced in its history. We shall not now say how large a portion of his success we ascribe to this intrepid temper of his genius; but we are confident that no person can read any of his wonderful works without feeling that their author was utterly careless of the reproach of small imperfections, disdained the inglorious labour of perpetual correctness, and has *consequently* imparted to his productions that spirit and ease and variety, which reminds us of better times, and gives lustre and effect to those rich and resplendent passages to which it left him free to aspire.

Lord Byron, in some respects, may appear not to have been wanting in intrepidity. He has not certainly been very tractable to advice, nor very patient of blame. But this, in him, we fear, is not superiority to censure, but aversion to it; and, instead of proving that he is indifferent to detraction, shows only, that the dread and dislike of it operate with more than common force on his mind. A critic whose object was to give pain, would desire no better proof of the efficacy of his inflictions than the bitter scorn and fierce defiance with which they are encountered; and the more vehemently the noble author protests that he despises the

reproaches that have been bestowed on him, the more certain it is that he suffers from their severity, and would be glad to escape if he cannot overbear them. But however this may be, we think it is certain that his late dramatic efforts have not been made carelessly, or without anxiety. To us, at least, they seem very elaborate and hardwrought compositions; and this indeed we take to be their leading characteristic, and the key to most of their peculiarities.

Considered as poems, we confess they appear to us to be rather heavy, verbose, and inelegant — deficient in the passion and energy which belongs to the other writings of the noble author — and still more in the richness of imagery, the originality of thought, and the sweetness of versification, for which he used to be distinguished. They are for the most part solemn, prolix, and ostentatious — lengthened out by large preparations for catastrophes that never arrive, and tantalising us with slight specimens and glimpses of a higher interest scattered thinly up and down many weary pages of pompous declamation. Along with the concentrated pathos and homestruck sentiments of his former poetry, the noble author seems also, we cannot imagine why, to have discarded the spirited and melodious versification in which they were embodied, and to have formed to himself a measure equally remote from the spring and vigour of his former compositions, and from the softness and flexibility of the ancient masters of the drama. There are some sweet lines, and many of great weight and energy; but the general march of the verse is cumbrous and unmusical. His lines do not vibrate like polished lances, at once strong and light, in the hands of his persons, but are wielded like clumsy batons in a bloodless affray. Instead of the graceful familiarity and idiomatical melodies of Shakspeare, it is apt, too, to fall into clumsy prose, in its approaches to the easy and colloquial style; and in the loftier passages is occasionally deformed by low and common images, that harmonise but ill with the general solemnity of the diction.

As plays, we are afraid we must also say that the pieces before us are wanting in interest, character and action: — at least we must say this of the two last of them — for *there is* interest in Sardanapalus — and beauties, besides, that make us blind to its other defects. There is, however, throughout, a want of dramatic effect and variety; and we suspect there is something in the character or habit of Lord Byron's genius which will render this unattainable. He has too little sympathy with the ordinary feelings and frailties of humanity, to succeed well in their representation — "His soul is like a star, and dwells apart." It does not "hold the mirror up to nature," nor catch the hues of surrounding objects; but, like a kindled furnace, throws out its intense glare and gloomy grandeur on the narrow scene which it irradiates. He has given us, in his other works, some glorious pictures of nature — some magnificent reflections, and some inimitable delineations of character: but the same feelings prevail in them all; and his portraits in particular, though a little varied in the drapery and attitude, seem all copied from the same original. His Childe Harold, his Giaour, Conrad, Lara, Manfred, Cain, and Lucifer, — are all one individual. There is the same varnish of voluptuousness on the surface — the same canker of misanthropy at the core of all he touches. He cannot draw the changes of many-coloured life, nor transport himself into the condition of the infinitely diversified characters by whom a stage should be peopled. The very intensity of his feelings — the loftiness of his views — the pride of his nature or his genius, withhold him from this identification; so that, in personating the heroes of the scene, he does little but repeat himself. It would be

better for him, we think, if it were otherwise; we are sure it would be better for his readers. He would get more fame, and things of far more worth than fame, if he would condescend to a more extended and cordial sympathy with his fellow-creatures; and we should have more variety of fine poetry, and, at all events, better tragedies. We have no business to read him a homily on the sinfulness of pride and uncharity; but we have a right to say, that it argues a poorness of genius to keep always to the same topics and persons; and that the world will weary at last of the most energetic pictures of misanthropes and madmen—outlaws and their mistresses!

A man gifted as he is, when he aspires at dramatic fame, should emulate the greatest of dramatists. Let Lord Byron, then, think of Shakspeare—and consider what a noble range of character, what a freedom from mannerism and egotism, there is in him! How much he seems to have studied nature; how little to have thought about himself; how seldom to have repeated or glanced back at his own most successful inventions! Why indeed should he? Nature was still open before him, and inexhaustible; and the freshness and variety that still delight his readers must have had constant attractions for himself. Take his Hamlet, for instance. What a character is there!—how full of thought, and refinement, and fancy, and individuality! "How infinite in faculties! In form and motion how express and admirable! The beauty of the universe, the paragon of animals!" Yet close the play, and we meet with him no more—neither in the author's other works, nor any where else! A common author, who had hit upon such a character, would have dragged it in at every turn, and worn it to very tatters. Sir John Falstaff, again, is a world of wit and humour in himself; but except in the two parts of Henry IV., there would have been no trace of such a being, had not the author been "ordered to continue him" in the Merry Wives of Windsor. He is not the least like Benedick, or Mercutio, or Sir Toby Belch, or any of the other witty personages of the same author,—nor are they like each other. Othello is one of the most striking and powerful inventions on the stage. But when the play closes, we hear no more of him! The poet's creation comes no more to life again under a fictitious name, than the real man would have done. Lord Byron, in Shakspeare's place, would have peopled the world with black Othellos! What indications are there of Lear in any of his earlier plays? What traces of it in any that he wrote afterwards? None. It might have been written by any other man, he is so little conscious of it. He never once returns to that huge sea of sorrow; but has left it standing by itself, shoreless and unapproachable. Who else could have afforded not to have "drowned the stage with tears" from such a source? But we must break away from Shakspeare, and come at last to the work before us.

In a very brief preface, Lord Byron renews his protest against looking upon any of his plays as having been composed "with the most remote view to the stage;" and, at the same time, testifies in behalf of the *Unities*, as essential to the existence of the drama—according to what "was, till lately, the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so in the more civilised parts of it." We do not think those opinions very consistent; and we think that neither of them could possibly find favour with a person whose genius had a truly dramatic character: we should as soon expect an orator to compose a speech altogether unfit to be spoken. A drama is not merely a dialogue, but *an action;* and necessarily supposes that something is to pass before the eyes of assembled spectators. Whatever is

peculiar to its written part, should derive its peculiarity from this consideration. Its style should be an accompaniment to action—and should be calculated to excite the emotions, and keep alive the attention, of gazing multitudes. If an author does not bear this continually in his mind, and does not write in the ideal presence of an eager and diversified assemblage, he may be a poet perhaps, but assuredly he never will be a dramatist. If Lord Byron really does not wish to impregnate his elaborate scenes with the living spirit of the drama—if he has no hankering after stage-effect,—if he is not haunted with the visible presentment of the persons he has created—if, in setting down a vehement invective, he does not fancy the tone in which Mr. Kean would deliver it, and anticipate the long applauses of the pit, then he may be sure that neither his feelings nor his genius are in unison with the stage at all. Why, then, should he affect the form without the power of tragedy? He may, indeed, produce a mystery, like Cain, or a far sweeter vision, like Manfred, without subjecting himself to the censure of legitimate criticism; but if, with a regular subject before him, capable of all the strength and graces of the drama, he does not feel himself able or willing to draw forth its resources so as to affect an audience with terror and delight, he is not the man we want—and his time and talents are wasted here. Didactic reasoning and eloquent description will not compensate, in a play, for a dearth of dramatic spirit and invention: and besides, sterling sense and poetry, as such, ought to stand by themselves, without the unmeaning mockery of a *dramatis personæ*.

As to Lord Byron's pretending to set up the *Unities* at this time of day, as "the law of literature throughout the world," it is mere caprice and contradiction. He, if ever man was, is *a law to himself*—"a chartered libertine;"—and now, when he is tired of this unbridled licence, he wants to do penance within the *Unities!* This certainly looks very like affectation; or, if there is any thing sincere in it, the motive must be, that, by getting rid of so much story and action, in order to simplify the plot and bring it within the prescribed limits, he may fill up the blank spaces with long discussions, and have nearly all the talk to himself! For ourselves, we will confess that we have had a considerable contempt for these same *Unities*, ever since we read Dennis's Criticism on Cato in our boyhood—except, indeed, the unity of action, which Lord Byron does not appear to set much store by. Dr. Johnson, we conceive, has pretty well settled this question: and if Lord Byron chooses to grapple with him, he will find that it requires a stronger arm than that with which he puts down our Laureates. We shall only add, that when the moderns tie themselves down to write tragedies of the same length, and on the same simple plan in other respects, with those of Sophocles and Æschylus, we shall not object to their adhering to the *Unities;* for there can, in that case, be no sufficient inducement for violating them. But, in the mean time, we hold that English dramatic poetry soars above the *Unities*, just as the imagination does. The only pretence for insisting on them is, that we suppose the stage itself to be, actually and really, the very spot on which a given action is performed; and, if so, this space cannot be removed to another. But the supposition is manifestly quite contrary to truth and experience. The stage is considered merely as a place in which any given action *ad libitum* may be performed; and accordingly may be shifted, and is so in imagination, as often as the action requires it. That any writer should ever have insisted on such an unity as this, must appear sufficiently preposterous; but that the defence of it should be taken up by an author whose plays

are never to be acted at all, and which, therefore, have nothing more than a nominal reference to any stage or locality whatever, must strike one as absolutely incredible.

It so happens, however, that the disadvantage, and in truth absurdity, of sacrificing higher objects to a formality of this kind, is strikingly displayed in one of these dramas — The Two Foscari. The whole interest here turns upon the younger of them having returned from banishment, in defiance of the law and its consequences, from an unconquerable longing after his own country. Now, the only way to have made this sentiment palpable, the practicable foundation of stupendous sufferings, would have been, to have presented him to the audience wearing out his heart in exile — and forming his resolution to return, at a distance from his country, or hovering, in excruciating suspense, within sight of its borders. We might then have caught some glimpse of the nature of his motives, and of so extraordinary a character. But as this would have been contrary to one of the unities, we first meet with him led from "the Question," and afterwards taken back to it in the Ducal Palace, or clinging to the dungeon-walls of his native city, and expiring from his dread of leaving them; and therefore feel more wonder than sympathy, when we are told, in a Jeremiad of wilful lamentations, that these agonising consequences have resulted, not from guilt or disaster, but merely from the intensity of his love for his country.

PARALLEL BETWEEN BYRON AND MOORE.*

It is curious to see two writers, so very able, and so very different, both treating the same singular and (as one might be tempted to suppose) almost intractable subject. All things, however, are possible to genius, and come within the range of poetry. We may set the reader's mind at once easy by stating, that there is nothing (or next to nothing) of that speculative daring in Lord Byron's present production that gave such just offence in his Mystery of Cain; and that Mr. Moore, in his new poem, has kept his amatory vein within the strict bounds of decorum. There is nothing equivocal in it but the title; and that may occasion some idle flutter and some trifling disappointment. The first of these very extraordinary performances may be read without incurring a frown from the brow of piety, and the last without calling up a blush in the cheek of modesty. Considering the nature of the subject, and the temper of the authors, this is a great and a rare merit. Perhaps they found themselves so near the edge of a precipice, that they were afraid, if they made one false step, of being hurled down "ten thousand fathom deep." To whatever cause we may attribute this cautious reserve and self-denial, we have to thank them for saving us *a world of moralising* — a tone in criticism we do not much affect, unless when it is forced upon us, and which we would gladly leave to the pulpit, or to the chairs of moral philosophy.

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* Loves of the Angels: by T. Moore. Heaven and Earth: by Lord Byron. — Vol. xxxviii. p. 27. February, 1823.

Mr. Moore, in his *Preface*, informs us, that he had somewhat hastened his publication, to obviate the disadvantage of coming after his friend Lord Byron; or, as he ingeniously expresses it, "By an earlier appearance in the literary horizon, to give himself the chance of what astronomers call an *heliacal rising*, before the luminary, in whose light he was to be lost, should appear." This is an amiable, but by no means a reasonable modesty. The light that plays round Mr. Moore's verses, tender, glancing, and brilliant, is in no danger of being extinguished even in the sullen glare of Lord Byron's genius. An aurora borealis might as well think of being put out by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. They are both bright stars in the firmament of modern poetry, but as distant and unlike as Saturn and Mercury. Their rising may be at the same time, but they can never move in the same orb, nor meet or jostle in "the wide pathless way" of fancy and invention. Let Mr. Moore then shine on, and fear no envious eclipse, unless it be from an excess of his own light!

We conceive, though these two celebrated writers in some measure divide the poetical public between them, that it is not the same public whose favour they severally enjoy in the highest degree. They are both read and admired, no doubt, in the same extended circle of taste and fashion; but each is the favourite of a totally different set of readers. Thus a lover may pay the same outward attention to two different women; but he only means to flirt with the one, while the other is the mistress of his heart. The gay, the fair, the witty, the happy, idolise Mr. Moore's delightful Muse, on her pedestal of airy smiles or transient tears. Lord Byron's severer verse is enshrined in the breasts of those whose gaiety has been turned to gall, whose fair exterior has a canker within, whose mirth has received a rebuke as if it were folly, from whom happiness has fled like a dream! If we compute the odds upon the known chances of human life, his Lordship will bid fair to have as numerous a class of votaries as his more agreeable rival! We are not going to give a preference, but we beg leave to make a distinction on the present occasion. The poetry of Moore is essentially that of *Fancy;* the poetry of Byron that of *Passion*. If there is passion in the effusions of the one, the fancy by which it is expressed predominates over it: if fancy is called to the aid of the other, it is still subservient to the passion. Lord Byron's jests are downright earnest; Mr. Moore, when he is most serious, seems half in jest. The latter plays and trifles with his subject, caresses and grows enamoured of it: the former grasps it eagerly to his bosom, breathes death upon it, and turns from it with loathing or dismay! The fine aroma that is exhaled from the flowers of poesy every where lends its perfume to the verse of the Bard of Erin. The noble bard (less fortunate in his Muse) tries to extract poison from them. If Lord Byron flings his own views or feelings upon outward objects (jaundicing the sun), Mr. Moore seems to exist in the delights, the virgin fancies, of nature. He is free of the Rosicrucian society; and enjoys an ethereal existence among troops of sylphs and spirits, and in a perpetual vision of wings, flowers, rainbows, smiles, blushes, tears, and kisses. Every page of his works is a vignette, every line that he writes glows or sparkles; and it would seem (so some one said who knew him well and loved him much) "as if his airy spirit, drawn from the sun, continually fluttered with fond aspirations to regain that native source of light and heat." The worst is, our author's mind is too vivid, too active, to suffer a moment's repose. We are cloyed with sweetness, and dazzled with splendour. Every image must "blush celestial rosy red, love's proper hue,"—every syllable must

breathe a sigh. A sentiment is lost in a simile — the simile is overloaded with an epithet. It is "like morn risen on mid-noon." No eventful story, no powerful contrast, no *moral*, none of the sordid details of human life (all is ethereal), none of its sharp calamities, or, if they inevitably occur, his Muse throws a soft glittering veil over them,

> "Like moonlight on a troubled sea,
> Brightening the storm it cannot calm."

We do not believe Mr. Moore ever writes a line, that in itself would not pass for poetry, that is not at least a vivid or harmonious commonplace. Lord Byron writes whole pages of sullen, crabbed prose, like a long dreary road that, however, leads to doleful shades or palaces of the blest. In short, Mr. Moore's Parnassus is a blooming Eden; Lord Byron's is a rugged wilderness of shame and sorrow. On the tree of knowledge of the first, you can see nothing but perpetual flowers and verdure: in the last, you see the naked stem and rough bark; but it heaves at intervals with inarticulate throes, and you hear the shrieks of a human voice within.

Critically speaking, Mr. Moore's poetry is chargeable with two peculiarities. First, the pleasure or interest he conveys to us is almost always derived from the first impressions or physical properties of objects, not from their connection with passion or circumstances. His lights dazzle the eye, his perfumes soothe the smell, his sounds ravish the ear: but then they do so for and from themselves, and at all times and places equally — for the heart has nothing to do with it. Hence we observe a kind of fastidious extravagance in Mr. Moore's serious poetry. Each thing must be fine, soft, exquisite in itself, for it is never set off by reflection or contrast. It glitters to the sense through an atmosphere of indifference. Our indolent, luxurious bard does not whet the appetite by setting us to hunt after the game of human passion; and is therefore obliged to pamper us with dainties, seasoned with rich fancy and the *sauce piquante* of poetic diction. Poetry, in his hands, becomes a kind of *cosmetic* art — it is the poetry of the toilette. His Muse must be as fine as the Lady of Loretto. The naked Venus, to some eyes, would seem a dowdy to her! Now, this principle of composition leads not only to a defect of dramatic interest, but also of imagination. For every thing in this world, the meanest incident or object, may receive a light and an importance from its association with other objects and with the heart of man; and the variety thus created is endless as it is striking and profound. But if we begin and end in those objects that are beautiful or dazzling in themselves and at first blush, we shall soon be confined to a narrow round of self-pleasing topics, and be both superficial and wearisome. It is the fault of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, that he has perversely relied too much (or wholly) on this reaction of the imagination on subjects that are petty and repulsive in themselves; and of Mr. Moore's, that he appeals too exclusively to the flattering support of sense and fancy. Secondly, we have remarked that Mr. Moore hardly ever describes entire objects, but abstract qualities of objects. It is not a picture that he gives us, but an inventory of beauty. He takes a blush, or a smile, and runs on whole stanzas in ecstatic praise of it, and then diverges to the sound of a voice, and "discourses eloquent music" on the subject; but it might as well be the light of Heaven that he is describing, or the voice of Echo — we have no human figure before us, no palpable reality answering to any substantive form in nature. Hence we think it may be explained why it is, that this author has so little picturesque

effect — with such vividness of conception, such insatiable ambition after ornament, and such an inexhaustible and delightful play of fancy. Mr. Moore is a colourist in poetry; a musician also; and has a heart full of tenderness and susceptibility for all that is delightful and amiable in itself, and that does not require the ordeal of suffering, of crime, or of deep thought, to stamp it with a bold character. In this, we conceive, consists the charm of his poetry, which all the world feel, but which it is so difficult for critics to explain scientifically, and in conformity to *transcendental rules*. It has the charm of the softest and most brilliant execution. There is no wrinkle, no deformity, on its smooth and shining surface. It has the charm which arises from the continual desire to please, and from the spontaneous sense of pleasure in the author's mind. Without being gross in the smallest degree, it is voluptuous in the highest. It is a sort of sylph-like, spiritualised sensuality. So far from being licentious in the present instance, Mr. Moore has become moral and sentimental (indeed he was always the last), and tantalises his young and fair readers with the glittering shadows and mystic adumbrations of evanescent delights. He (in fine), in his courtship of the Muses, resembles those lovers who always say the softest things on all occasions; who smile with irresistible good humour at their own success; who banish pain and truth from their thoughts, and who impart the delight they feel in themselves unconsciously to others! Mr. Moore's poetry is the thornless rose — its touch is velvet, its hue vermilion, and its graceful form is cast in beauty's mould. Lord Byron's is a prickly bramble, or sometimes a deadly Upas, of form uncouth and uninviting, that has its root in the clefts of the rock, and its head mocking the skies, round which the loud cataracts roar, and that wars with the thunder cloud and tempest.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.*

Mr. Scott, though living in an age unusually prolific of original poetry, has manifestly outstripped all his competitors in the race of popularity; and stands already upon a height to which no other writer has attained in the memory of any one now alive. We doubt, indeed, whether any English poet *ever* had so many of his books sold, or so many of his verses read and admired by such a multitude of persons in so short a time. We are credibly informed that nearly thirty thousand copies of "The Lay" have been already disposed of in this country; and that the demand for Marmion, and the poem now before us, has been still more considerable, — a circulation, we believe, altogether without example, in the case of a bulky work, not addressed to the bigotry of the mere mob, either religious or political.

A popularity so universal is a pretty sure proof of extraordinary merit, —a far surer one, we readily admit, than would be afforded by any praises of ours; and therefore, though we pretend to be privileged, in ordinary cases, to foretel the ultimate reception of all claims on public admiration, our function may be thought to cease, where the event is already so cer-

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* The Lady of the Lake. — Vol. xvi. p. 263. August, 1810.

tain and conspicuous. As it is a sore thing, however, to be deprived of our privileges on so important an occasion, we hope to be pardoned for insinuating, that, even in such a case, the office of the critic may not be altogether superfluous. Though the success of the author be decisive, and likely to be permanent, it still may not be without its use to point out, in consequence of what, and in spite of what, he has succeeded; nor altogether uninstructive to trace the precise limits of the connection which, even in this dull world, indisputably subsists between success and desert, and to ascertain how far unexampled popularity implies unrivalled talent.

As it is the object of poetry to give pleasure, it seems to be a pretty safe conclusion, that that poetry must be the best which gives the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of persons. Yet we must pause a little before we give our assent to so plausible a proposition. It would not be quite correct, we fear, to say that those are invariably the best judges who are most easily pleased. The great multitude, even of the reading world, must necessarily be uninstructed and injudicious; and will frequently be found, not only to derive pleasure from what is worthless in finer eyes, but to be quite insensible to those beauties which afford the most exquisite delight to more cultivated understandings. True pathos and sublimity will indeed charm every one: but, out of this lofty sphere, we are pretty well convinced, that the poetry which appears most perfect to a very refined taste will not turn out to be very popular poetry.

This, indeed, is saying nothing more than that the ordinary readers of poetry have not a very refined taste; and that they are often insensible to many of its highest beauties, while they still more frequently mistake its imperfections for excellence. The fact, when stated in this simple way, commonly excites neither opposition nor surprise: and yet, if it be asked why the taste of a few individuals, who do not perceive beauty where many others perceive it, should be exclusively dignified with the name of a good taste; or why poetry which gives pleasure to a very great number of readers, should be thought inferior to that which pleases a much smaller number; — the answer, perhaps, may not be quite so ready as might have been expected from the alacrity of our assent to the first proposition. That there is a good answer to be given, however, we entertain no doubt: and if that which we are about to offer should not appear very clear or satisfactory, we must submit to have it thought that the fault is not altogether in the subject.

In the first place, then, it should be remembered, that though the taste of very good judges is necessarily the taste of a few, it is implied, in their description, that they are persons eminently qualified, by natural sensibility, and long experience and reflection, to perceive all beauties that really exist, as well as to settle the relative value and importance of all the different sorts of beauty; — they are in that very state, in short, to which all who are in any degree capable of tasting those refined pleasures would certainly arrive, if their sensibility were increased, and their experience and reflection enlarged. It is difficult, therefore, in following out the ordinary analogies of language, to avoid considering them as in the right, and calling their taste the true and the just one, when it appears that it is such as is uniformly produced by the cultivation of those faculties upon which all our perceptions of taste so obviously depend. It is to be considered also, that though it be the end of poetry to please, one of the parties whose pleasure, and whose notions of excellence, will always be

primarily consulted in its composition is the poet himself; and as he must necessarily be more cultivated than the great body of his readers, the presumption is, that he will always belong, comparatively speaking, to the class of good judges, and endeavour, consequently, to produce that sort of excellence which is likely to meet with *their* approbation. When authors, and those of whose suffrages authors are ambitious, thus conspire to fix upon the same standard of what is good in taste of composition, it is easy to see how it should come to bear this name in society, in preference to what might afford more pleasure to individuals of less influence. Besides all this, it is obvious that it must be infinitely more *difficult* to produce any thing conformable to this exalted standard, than merely to fall in with the current of popular taste. To attain the former object it is necessary, for the most part, to understand thoroughly all the feelings and associations that are modified or created by cultivation; — to accomplish the latter, it will often be sufficient merely to have observed the course of familiar preferences. Success, however, is rare in proportion as it is difficult; and it is needless to say what a vast addition rarity makes to value, or how exactly our admiration at success is proportioned to our sense of the difficulty of the undertaking.

Such seem to be the most general and immediate causes of the apparent paradox, of reckoning that which pleases the greatest number as inferior to that which pleases the few; and such the leading grounds for fixing the standard of excellence, in a question of mere feeling and gratification, by a different rule than that of the quantity of gratification produced. With regard to some of the fine arts — for the distinction between popular and actual merit obtains in them all — there are no other reasons, perhaps, to be assigned; and, in music for example, when we have said that it is the *authority* of those who are best qualified by nature and study, and the *difficulty* and *rarity* of the attainment, that entitles certain exquisite performances to rank higher than others that give far more general delight, we have probably said all that can be said in explanation of this mode of speaking and judging. In poetry, however, and in some other departments, this familiar, though somewhat extraordinary rule of estimation, is justified by other considerations.

As it is the cultivation of natural and perhaps universal capacities that produces that refined taste which takes away our pleasure in vulgar excellence, so it is to be considered, that there is an universal tendency to the propagation of such a state; and that, in times tolerably favourable to human happiness, there is a continual progress of improvement in this, as in the other faculties of nations and large assemblages of men. The number of intelligent judges may, therefore, be regarded as perpetually on the increase. The inner circle, to which the poet delights chiefly to pitch his voice, is perpetually enlarging; and, looking to that great futurity to which his ambition is constantly directed, it may be found that the most refined style of composition to which he can attain, will be, at the last, the most extensively and permanently popular. This holds true, we think, with regard to all the productions of art that are open to the inspection of any considerable part of the community; but, with regard to poetry in particular, there is one circumstance to be attended to that renders this conclusion peculiarly safe, and goes far indeed to reconcile the taste of the multitude with that of more cultivated judges.

As it seems difficult to conceive that mere cultivation should either absolutely create or utterly destroy any natural capacity of enjoyment, it is not easy to suppose, that the qualities which delight the uninstructed

should be substantially different from those which give pleasure to the enlightened. They may be arranged according to a different scale,—and certain shades and accompaniments may be more or less indispensable; but the qualities in a poem that give most pleasure to the refined and fastidious critic, are in substance, we believe, the very same that delight the most injudicious of its admirers:—and the very wide difference which exists between their usual estimates may be in a great degree accounted for, by considering that the one judges absolutely, and the other relatively—that the one attends only to the intrinsic qualities of the *work*, while the other refers more immediately to the merit of the *author*. The most popular passages in popular poetry are, in fact, for the most part, very beautiful and striking; yet they are very often such passages as could never be ventured on by any writer who aimed at the praise of the judicious; and this for the obvious reason, that they are trite and hackneyed,—that they have been repeated till they have lost all grace and propriety,—and, instead of exalting the imagination with the impression of original genius or creative fancy, they only nauseate and offend by the association of paltry plagiarism and impudent inanity. It is only, however, on those who have read and remembered the original passages, and their better imitations, that this effect is produced. To the ignorant and the careless, the twentieth imitation has all the charm of an original; and that which oppresses the more experienced reader with weariness and disgust, rouses them with all the force and vivacity of novelty. It is not, then, because the ornaments of popular poetry re deficient in intrinsic worth and beauty that they are slighted by the critical reader, but because he at once recognises them to be stolen, and perceives that they are arranged without taste or congruity. In his indignation at the dishonesty, and his contempt for the poverty of the collector, he overlooks altogether the value of what he has collected, or remembers it only as an aggravation of his offence,—as converting larceny into sacrilege, and adding the guilt of profanation to the folly of unsuitable finery. There are other features, no doubt, that distinguish the idols of vulgar admiration from the beautiful exemplars of pure taste; but this is so much the most characteristic and remarkable, that we know no way in which we could so shortly describe the poetry that pleases the multitude, and displeases the select few, as by saying that it consisted of all the most known and most brilliant parts of the most celebrated authors—of a splendid and unmeaning accumulation of those images and phrases which had long charmed every reader in the works of their original inventors.

The justice of these remarks will probably be at once admitted by all who have attended to the history and effects of what may be called *poetical diction* in general, or even of such particular phrases and epithets as have been indebted to their beauty for too great a notoriety. Our associations with all this class of expressions, which have become trite only in consequence of their intrinsic excellence, now suggest to us no ideas but those of schoolboy imbecility and childish affectation. We look upon them merely as the common, hired, and tawdry trappings of all who wish to put on, for the hour, the masquerade habit of poetry; and, instead of receiving from them any kind of delight or emotion, do not even distinguish or attend to the signification of the words of which they consist. The ear is so palled with their repetition, and so accustomed to meet with them as the habitual expletives of the lowest class of versifiers, that they come at last to pass over it without exciting any sort of

conception whatever, and are not even so much attended to as to expose their most gross incoherence or inconsistency to detection. It is of this quality that Swift has availed himself in so remarkable a manner, in his famous "Song by a person of quality," which consists entirely in a selection of some of the most trite and well-sounding phrases and epithets in the poetical lexicon, strung together without any kind of meaning or consistency, and yet so disposed, as to have been perused, perhaps by one half of their readers, without any suspicion of the deception. Most of those phrases, however, which had thus become sickening, and almost insignificant, to the intelligent readers of poetry in the days of Queen Anne, are in themselves beautiful and expressive, and, no doubt, retain much of their native grace in those ears that have not been alienated by their repetition.

But it is not merely from the use of much excellent diction, that a modern poet is thus debarred by the lavishness of his predecessors. There is a certain range of subjects and characters, and a certain manner and tone, which were probably, in their origin, as graceful and attractive, which have been proscribed by the same dread of imitation. It would be too long to enter, in this place, into any detailed examination of the peculiarities — originating chiefly in this source — which distinguish ancient from modern poetry. It may be enough just to remark, that, as the elements of poetical emotion are necessarily limited, so it was natural for those who first sought to excite it to avail themselves of those subjects, situations, and images that were most obviously calculated to produce that effect, and to assist them by the use of all those aggravating circumstances that most readily occurred as likely to heighten their operation. In this way, they got possession of all the choice materials of their art; and working without fear of comparisons, fell naturally into a free and graceful style of execution, at the same time that the profusion of their resources made them somewhat careless and inexpert in their application. After poets were in a very different situation. They could neither take the most natural and general topics of interest, nor treat them with the ease and indifference of those who had the whole store at their command — because this was precisely what had been already done by those who had gone before them; and they were therefore put upon various expedients for attaining their object, and yet preserving their claim to originality. Some of them set themselves to observe and delineate both characters and external objects with greater minuteness and fidelity, — and others to analyse more carefully the mingling passions of the heart, and to feed and cherish a more limited train of emotion through a longer and more artful career, — while a third sort distorted both nature and passion according to some fantastical theory of their own, or took such a narrow corner of each, and dissected it with such curious and microscopic accuracy, that its original form was no longer discernible by the eyes of the uninstructed. In this way we think that modern poetry has both been enriched with more exquisite pictures, and deeper and more sustained strains of pathetic, than were known to the less elaborate artists of antiquity; at the same time that it has been defaced with more affectation, and loaded with far more intricacy. But whether they failed or succeeded, — and whether they distinguished themselves from their predecessors by faults or by excellences, — the later poets, we conceive, must be admitted to have almost always written in a more constrained and narrow manner than their originals, and to have departed farther from what was obvious, easy, and natural. Modern poetry, in this

respect, may be compared perhaps, without any great impropriety, to modern sculpture. It is greatly inferior to the ancient in freedom, grace, and simplicity; but, in return, possesses a more decided expression, and more fine finishing of less suitable embellishments.

Whatever may be gained or lost, however, by this change of manner, it is obvious that poetry must become less popular by means of it. The most natural and obvious manner is always the most taking; and whatever costs the author much pains and labour, is usually found to require a corresponding effort on the part of the reader, which all readers are not disposed to make. That they who seek to be original by means of affectation should revolt more by their affectation than they attract by their originality, is just and natural; but even the nobler devices that win the suffrages of the judicious by their intrinsic beauty, as well as their novelty, are extremely apt to repel the multitude, and to obstruct the popularity of some of the most exquisite productions of genius. The beautiful but minute delineations of such admirable observers as Crabbe or Cowper are apt to appear tedious to those who take no interest in their subjects, and no concern about their art; and the refined, deep, and sustained pathetic of Campbell is still more apt to be mistaken for monotony and languor, by those who are either devoid of sensibility, or impatient of quiet reflection. The most popular style undoubtedly is that which has great variety and brilliancy, rather than exquisite finish in its images and descriptions; and which touches lightly on many passions, without raising any so high as to transcend the comprehension of ordinary mortals, or dwelling on it so long as to exhaust their patience.

Whether Mr. Scott holds the same opinion with us upon these matters, and has intentionally conformed his practice to this theory, or whether the peculiarities in his compositions have been produced merely by following out the natural bent of his genius, we do not presume to determine: but, that he has actually made use of all our recipes for popularity, we think very evident; and conceive, that few things are more curious than the singular skill, or good fortune, with which he has reconciled his claims on the favour of the multitude with his pretensions to more select admiration. Confident in the force and originality of his own genius, he has not been afraid to avail himself of commonplaces both of diction and of sentiment, whenever they appeared to be beautiful or impressive, — using them however, at all times, with the skill and spirit of an inventor: and, quite certain that he could not be mistaken for a plagiarist or imitator, he has made free use of that great treasury of characters, images, and expressions, which had been accumulated by the most celebrated of his predecessors; — at the same time that the rapidity of his transitions, the novelty of his combinations, and the spirit and variety of his own thoughts and inventions, show plainly that he was a borrower from any thing but poverty, and took only what he could have given if he had been born in an earlier generation. The great secret of his popularity, however, and the leading characteristic of his poetry, appear to us to consist evidently in this, — that he has made more use of common topics, images, and expressions than any original poet of later times; and, at the same time, displayed more genius and originality than any recent author who has worked in the same materials. By the latter peculiarity, he has entitled himself to the admiration of every description of readers; — by the former, he is recommended in an especial manner to the inexperienced, at the hazard of some little offence to the more cultivated and fastidious.

In the choice of his subjects, for example, he does not attempt to interest merely by fine observation or pathetic sentiment, but takes the assistance of a story, and enlists the reader's curiosity among his motives for attention. Then his characters are all selected from the most common *dramatis personæ* of poetry, — kings, warriors, knights, outlaws, nuns, minstrels, secluded damsels, wizards, and true lovers. He never ventures to carry us into the cottage of the peasant, like Crabbe or Cowper; nor into the bosom of domestic privacy, like Campbell; nor among creatures of the imagination, like Southey or Darwin. Such personages, we readily admit, are not in themselves so interesting or striking as those to whom Mr. Scott has devoted himself; but they are far less familiar in poetry — and are therefore more likely, perhaps, to engage the attention of those to whom poetry is familiar. In the management of the passions, again, Mr. Scott appears to us to have pursued the same popular and, comparatively, easy course. He has raised all the most familiar and poetical emotions, by the most obvious aggravations, and in the most compendious and judicious way. He has dazzled the reader with the splendour, and even warmed him with the transient heat of various affections; but he has nowhere fairly kindled him with enthusiasm, or melted him into tenderness. Writing for the world at large, he has wisely abstained from attempting to raise any passion to a height to which worldly people could not be transported; and contented himself with giving his reader the chance of feeling as a brave, kind, and affectionate gentleman should often feel in the ordinary course of his existence, without trying to breathe into him either that lofty enthusiasm which disdains the ordinary business and amusements of life, or that quiet and deep sensibility which unfits for all its pursuits. With regard to diction and imagery, too, it is quite obvious that Mr. Scott has not aimed at writing either in a pure or a very consistent style. He seems to have been anxious only to strike, and to be easily and universally understood; and, for this purpose, to have culled the most glittering and conspicuous expressions of the most popular authors, and to have interwoven them in splendid confusion with his own nervous diction and irregular versification. Indifferent whether he coins or borrows, and drawing with equal freedom on his memory and his imagination, he goes boldly forward, in full reliance on a never-failing abundance; and dazzles with his richness and variety even those who are most apt to be offended with his glare and irregularity. There is nothing in Mr. Scott of the severe and majestic style of Milton — or of the terse and fine composition of Pope — or of the elaborate elegance and melody of Campbell — or even of the flowing and redundant diction of Southey; but there is a medley of bright images and glowing words, set carelessly and loosely together, — a diction, tinged successively with the careless richness of Shakspeare, the harshness and antique simplicity of the old romances, the homeliness of vulgar ballads and anecdotes, and the sentimental glitter of the most modern poetry, — passing from the borders of the ludicrous to those of the sublime — alternately minute and energetic — sometimes artificial, and frequently negligent, — but always full of spirit and vivacity — abounding in images, that are striking, at first sight, to minds of every contexture — and never expressing a sentiment which it can cost the most ordinary reader an exertion to comprehend.

Such seem to be the leading qualities that have contributed to Mr. Scott's popularity; and, as some of them are obviously of a kind to diminish his merit in the eyes of more fastidious judges, it is but fair to

complete this view of his peculiarities by a hasty notice of such of them as entitle him to unqualified admiration; — and here it is impossible not to be struck with that vivifying spirit of strength and animation which pervades all the inequalities of his composition, and keeps constantly on the mind of the reader the impression of great power, spirit, and intrepidity. There is nothing cold, creeping, or feeble in all Mr. Scott's poetry; — no laborious littleness, or puling classical affectation. He has his failures, indeed, like other people; but he always attempts vigorously, and never fails in his immediate object, without accomplishing something far beyond the reach of an ordinary writer. Even when he wanders from the paths of pure taste, he leaves behind him the footsteps of a powerful genius; and moulds the most humble of his materials into a form worthy of a nobler substance. Allied to this inherent vigour and animation, and in a great degree derived from it, is that air of facility and freedom which adds so peculiar a grace to most of Mr. Scott's compositions. There is certainly no living poet whose works seem to come from him with so much ease, or who so seldom appears to labour, even in the most burdensome parts of his performance. He seems, indeed, never to think either of himself or his reader, but to be completely identified and lost in the personage with whom he is occupied; and the attention of the reader is, consequently, either transferred unbroken to their adventures, or, if it glance back for a moment to the author, it is only to think how much more might be done, by putting forth that strength at full, which has, without effort, accomplished so many wonders. It is owing partly to these qualities, and partly to the great variety of his style, that Mr. Scott is much less frequently tedious than any other bulky poet with whom we are acquainted. His store of images is so copious, that he never dwells upon one long enough to produce weariness in the reader; and, even where he deals in borrowed or in tawdry wares, the rapidity of his transitions, and the transient glance with which he is satisfied as to each, leave the critic no time to be offended, and hurry him forward along with the multitude, enchanted with the brilliancy of the exhibition. Thus, the very frequency of his deviations from pure taste comes, in some sort, to constitute their apology; and the profusion and variety of his faults to afford a new proof of his genius.

These, we think, are the general characteristics of Mr. Scott's poetry. Among his minor peculiarities, we might notice his singular talent for description, and especially for the description of scenes abounding in *motion* or *action* of any kind. In this department, indeed, we conceive him to be almost without a rival, either among modern or ancient poets; and the character and process of his descriptions are as extraordinary as their effect is astonishing. He places before the eyes of his readers a more distinct and complete picture, perhaps, than any other artist ever presented by mere words; and yet he does not enumerate all the visible parts of the subject with any degree of minuteness, nor confine himself by any means to what is visible. The singular merit of his delineations, on the contrary, consists in this, that, with a few bold and abrupt strokes, he finishes a most spirited outline, — and then instantly kindles it by the sudden light and colour of some moral affection. There are none of his fine descriptions, accordingly, which do not derive a great part of their clearness and picturesque effect, as well as their interest, from the quantity of character and moral expression which is thus blended with their details, and which, so far from interrupting the conception of the

external object, very powerfully stimulate the fancy of the reader to complete it; and give a grace and a spirit to the whole representation, of which we do not know where to look for any other example.

Another very striking peculiarity in Mr. Scott's poetry is the air of freedom and nature which he has contrived to impart to most of his distinguished characters; and with which no poet more modern than Shakspeare has ventured to represent personages of such dignity. We do not allude here merely to the genuine familiarity and homeliness of many of his scenes and dialogues, but to the air of gaiety and playfulness in which persons of high rank seem, from time immemorial, to have thought it necessary to array, not their courtesy only, but their generosity and their hostility. This tone of good society Mr. Scott has shed over his higher chara ters with great grace and effect; and has, in this way, not only made his representations much more faithful and true to nature, but has very agreeably relieved the monotony of that tragic solemnity which ordinary writers appear to think indispensable to the dignity of poetical heroes and heroines. We are not sure, however, whether he has not occasionally exceeded a little in the use of this ornament; and given, now and then, too coquettish and trifling a tone to discussions of great interest. *

WORDSWORTH. †

This author is known to belong to a certain brotherhood of poets, who have haunted for some years about the Lakes of Cumberland; and is generally looked upon, we believe, as the purest model of the excellences and peculiarities of the school which they have been labouring to establish. Of the general merits of that school we have had occasion to express our opinion pretty fully in more places than one, and even to make some allusion to the former publications of the writer now before us. We are glad, however, to have found an opportunity of attending somewhat more particularly to his pretensions.

The Lyrical Ballads were unquestionably popular, and, we have no hesitation in saying, deservedly popular; for, in spite of their occasional vulgarity, affectation, and silliness, they were undoubtedly characterised by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling; and recommended to all good minds by the clear impression which they bore of the amiable dispositions and virtuous principles of the author. By the help of these qualities, they were enabled, not only to recommend themselves to the indulgence of many judicious readers, but even to beget, among a pretty numerous class of persons, a sort of admiration of the very defects by which they were attended. It was upon this account chiefly that we thought it necessary to set ourselves against this alarming innovation. Childishness, conceit, and affectation are not of themselves very popular or attractive; and though mere novelty has sometimes been found sufficient

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* Reviews of Scott's Poems and Miscellaneous Works will be found in Vol. i. p. 395. Vol. iv. p. 427. Vol. vi. p. 1. Vol. xii. p. 1. Vol. xvi. p. 447. Vol. xviii. p. 379. Vol. xxiv. p. 273. Vol. xxvii. p. 1.

† Poems by William Wordsworth. — Vol. xi. p. 214. October, 1807.

to give them a temporary currency, we should have had no fear of their prevailing to any dangerous extent, if they had been graced with no more seductive accompaniments. It was precisely because the perverseness and bad taste of this new school was combined with a great deal of genius and of laudable feeling, that we were afraid of their spreading and gaining ground among us, and that we entered into the discussion with a degree of zeal and animosity which some might think unreasonable towards authors, to whom so much merit had been conceded. There were times and moods, indeed, in which we were led to suspect ourselves of unjustifiable severity, and to doubt, whether a sense of public duty had not carried us rather too far in reprobation of errors that seemed to be atoned for by excellences of no vulgar description. At other times, the magnitude of these errors — the disgusting absurdities into which they led their feebler admirers, and the derision and contempt which they drew from the more fastidious, even upon the merits with which they were associated, — made us wonder more than ever at the perversity by which they were retained, and regret that we had not declared ourselves against them with still more formidable and decided hostility.

In this temper of mind, we read the *annonce* of Mr. Wordsworth's publication with a good deal of interest and expectation, and opened his volumes with greater anxiety than he or his admirers will probably give us credit for. We have been greatly disappointed certainly as to the quality of the poetry; but we doubt whether the publication has afforded so much satisfaction to any other of his readers; — it has freed us from all doubt or hesitation as to the justice of our former censures, and has brought the matter to a test, which we cannot help hoping may be convincing to the author himself.

Mr. Wordsworth, we think, has now brought the question, as to the merit of his new school of poetry, to a very fair and decisive issue. The volumes before us are much more strongly marked by all its peculiarities than any former publication of the fraternity. In our apprehension, they are, on this very account, infinitely less interesting or meritorious; but it belongs to the public, and not to us, to decide upon their merit; and we will confess, that so strong is our conviction of their obvious inferiority, and the grounds of it, that we are willing for once to wave our right of appealing to posterity, and to take the judgment of the present generation of readers, and even of Mr. Wordsworth's former admirers, as conclusive on this occasion. If these volumes, which have all the benefit of the author's former popularity, turn out to be nearly as popular as the Lyrical Ballads — if they sell nearly to the same extent — or are quoted and imitated among half as many individuals,—we shall admit that Mr. Wordsworth has come much nearer the truth in his judgment of what constitutes the charm of poetry than we had previously imagined, and shall institute a more serious and respectful enquiry into his principles of composition than we have yet thought necessary. On the other hand, — if this little work, selected from the compositions of five maturer years, and written avowedly for the purpose of exalting a system which has already excited a good deal of attention, should be generally rejected by those whose prepossessions were in its favour, there is room to hope, not only that the system itself will meet with no more encouragement, but even that the author will be persuaded to abandon a plan of writing which defrauds his talents and industry of their natural reward.

Putting ourselves thus upon our country, we certainly look for a verdict against this publication; and have little doubt indeed of the result, upon

a fair consideration of the evidence contained in these volumes. To accelerate that result, and to give a general view of the evidence to those into whose hands the record may not have already fallen, we must now make a few observations and extracts.

We shall not resume any of the particular discussions by which we formerly attempted to ascertain the value of the improvements which this new school has effected in poetry*; but shall lay the grounds of our opposition, for this time, a little more broadly. The end of poetry, we take it, is to please—and the name, we think, is strictly applicable to every metrical composition from which we receive pleasure, without any laborious exercise of the understanding. This pleasure may, in general, be analysed into three parts; that which we receive from the excitement of Passion or Emotion—that which is derived from the play of Imagination, or the easy exercise of Reason—and that which depends on the character and qualities of the Diction. The two first are the vital and primary springs of poetical delight, and can scarcely require explanation to any one. The last has been alternately overrated and undervalued by the professors of the poetical art; and is in such low estimation with the author now before us, and his associates, that it is necessary to say a few words in explanation of it.

One great beauty of diction exists only for those who have some degree of scholarship or critical skill. This is what depends on the exquisite *propriety* of the words employed, and the delicacy with which they are adapted to the meaning which is to be expressed. Many of the finest passages in Virgil and Pope derive their principal charm from the fine propriety of their diction. Another source of beauty, which extends only to the more instructed class of readers, is that which consists in the judicious or happy application of expressions which have been sanctified by the use of famous writers, or which bear the stamp of a simple or venerable antiquity. There are other beauties of diction, however, which are perceptible by all—the beauties of sweet sound and pleasant associations. The melody of words and verses is indifferent to no reader of poetry; but the chief recommendation of poetical language is certainly derived from those general associations, which give it a character of dignity or elegance, sublimity or tenderness. Every one knows that there are low and mean expressions, as well as lofty and grave ones; and that some words bear the impression of coarseness and vulgarity, as clearly as others do of refinement and affection. We do not mean, of course, to say any thing in defence of the hackneyed commonplaces of ordinary versemen. Whatever might have been the original character of these unlucky phrases, they are now associated with nothing but ideas of schoolboy imbecility and vulgar affectation. But what we do maintain is, that much of the most popular poetry in the world owes its celebrity chiefly to the beauty of its diction; and that no poetry can be long or generally acceptable, the language of which is coarse, inelegant, or infantine.

From this great source of pleasure, we think, the readers of Mr. Wordsworth are in a great measure cut off. His diction has nowhere any pretensions to elegance or dignity; and he has scarcely ever condescended to give the grace of correctness or melody to his versification. If it were merely slovenly and neglected, however, all this might be endured. Strong sense and powerful feeling will ennoble any expressions; or, at least, no one who is capable of estimating those higher merits will be disposed

* See Vol. i. p. 63, &c.; Vol. vii. p. 1, &c.

to mark these little defects. But, in good truth, no man now-a-days composes verses for publication with a slovenly neglect of their language. It is a fine and laborious manufacture, which can scarcely ever be made in a hurry; and the faults which it has may, for the most part, be set down to bad taste or incapacity, rather than to carelessness or oversight. With Mr. Wordsworth and his friends, it is plain that their peculiarities of diction are things of choice, and not of accident. They write as they do upon principle and system; and it evidently costs them much pains to keep *down* to the standard which they have proposed to themselves. They are, to the full, as much mannerists, too, as the poetasters who ring changes on the commonplaces of magazine versification; and all the difference between them is, that they borrow their phrases from a different and a scantier *Gradus ad Parnassum*. If they were, indeed, to discard all imitation and set phraseology, and to bring in no words merely for show or for metre,—as much, perhaps, might be gained in freedom and originality, as would infallibly be lost in allusion and authority; but, in point of fact, the new poets are just as great borrowers as the old; only that, instead of borrowing from the more popular passages of their illustrious predecessors, they have preferred furnishing themselves from vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries.

Their peculiarities of diction alone are enough, perhaps, to render them ridiculous; but the author before us really seems anxious to court this literary martyrdom by a device still more infallible,—we mean that of connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions with objects and incidents which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting. Whether this is done from affectation and conceit alone, or whether it may not arise, in some measure, from the self-illusion of a mind of extraordinary sensibility, habituated to solitary meditation, we cannot undertake to determine. It is possible enough, we allow, that the sight of a friend's garden-spade, or a sparrow's nest, or a man gathering leeches, might really have suggested to such a mind a train of powerful impressions and interesting reflections; but it is certain, that, to most minds, such associations will always appear forced, strained, and unnatural; and that the composition in which it is attempted to exhibit them will always have the air of parody, or ludicrous and affected singularity. All the world laughs at Elegiac stanzas to a sucking-pig—a Hymn on Washing-day—Sonnets to one's grandmother—or Pindarics on gooseberry-pie; and yet, we are afraid, it will not be quite easy to convince Mr. Wordsworth that the same ridicule must infallibly attach to most of the pathetic pieces in these volumes. To satisfy our readers, however, as to the justice of this and our other anticipations, we shall proceed, without further preface, to lay before them a short view of their contents.

The first is a kind of ode "to the Daisy,"—very flat, feeble, and affected; and in a diction as artificial, and as much encumbered with heavy expletives, as the theme of an unpractised schoolboy. The two following stanzas will serve as a specimen:—

"When soothed a while by milder airs,
Thee Winter in the garland wears
That thinly shades his few grey hairs;
Spring cannot shun thee;
Whole summer fields are thine by right;
And Autumn, melancholy wight!
Doth in thy crimson head delight
When rains are on thee

In shoals and bands a morrice train,
Thou greet'st the Traveller in the lane;
If welcome once thou count'st it gain;
Thou art not daunted,
Nor carest if thou be set at naught;
And oft alone in nooks remote
We meet thee, like a pleasant thought,
When such are wanted." Vol. i. p. 2.

The scope of the piece is to say, that the flower is found every where; and that it has suggested many pleasant thoughts to the author—some chime of fancy "*wrong or right*"—some feeling of devotion "*more or less*"—and other elegancies of the same stamp. It ends with this unmeaning prophecy:—

" Thou long the poet's praise shalt gain;
Thou wilt be more beloved by men
In times to come; thou not in vain
Art nature's favourite." Vol. i. p. 6.

The next is called " Louisa," and begins in this dashing and affected manner:—

" I met Louisa in the shade;
And, having seen that lovely maid,
Why should I fear to say,
That she is ruddy, fleet, and *strong;*
And down the rocks can leap along,
Like rivulets in May?" Vol. i. p. 7.

Does Mr. Wordsworth really imagine that this is at all more natural or engaging than the ditties of our common song writers?

A little farther on we have another original piece, entitled, " The Redbreast and the Butterfly," of which our readers will probably be contented with the first stanza.

" Art thou the bird whom man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin;
The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing?
Art thou the Peter of Norway Boors?
Their Thomas in Finland;
And Russia far inland?
The bird, whom, *by some name or other,*
All men who know thee call their brother,
The darling of children and men?
Could father Adam open his eyes,
And see this sight beneath the skies,
He'd wish to close them again." Vol. i. p. 16.

This, it must be confessed, is " Silly Sooth" in good earnest. The three last lines seem to be downright raving.

By and by, we have a piece of namby-pamby " to the Small Celandine," which we should almost have taken for a professed imitation of one of Mr. Philips's prettyisms. Here is a page of it:—

" Comfort have thou of thy merit,
Kindly, unassuming spirit!
Careless of thy neighbourhood,
Thou dost show thy pleasant face
On the moor, and in the wood,
In the lane;—there's not a place,

Howsoever mean it be,
But 'tis good enough for thee.
Ill befall the yellow flowers,
Children of the flaring hours!
Buttercups, that will be seen,
Whether we will see or no;
Others, too, of lofty mien;
They have done as worldlings do,
Taken praise that should be thine,
Little, humble Celandine!" Vol. i. p. 25.

After talking of its "bright coronet,"

"And its arch and wily ways,
And its store of other praise,"

the ditty is wound up with this piece of babyish absurdity:—

"Thou art not beyond the moon,
But a thing 'beneath our shoon;'
Let, as Old Magellan did,
Others roam about the sea;
Build who will a pyramid;
Praise it is enough for me,
If there be but three or four
Who will love my little flower." Vol. i. p. 30.

After this come some more manly lines on "The Character of the Happy Warrior," and a chivalrous legend on "The Horn of Egremont Castle," which, without being very good, is very tolerable, and free from most of the author's habitual defects. Then follow some pretty, but professedly childish verses, on a kitten playing with the falling leaves. There is rather too much of Mr. Ambrose Philips here and there in this piece also; but it is amiable and lively.

Farther on we find an "Ode to Duty," in which the lofty vein is very unsuccessfully attempted. This is the concluding stanza:—

"Stern lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we any thing so fair
As is the smile upon thy face;
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds;
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong."
Vol. i. p. 73.

The two last lines seem to be utterly without meaning; at least we have no sort of conception in what sense *Duty* can be said to keep the old skies *fresh*, and the stars from wrong.

The next piece, entitled "The Beggars," may be taken, we fancy, as a touchstone of Mr. Wordsworth's merit. There is something about it that convinces us it is a favourite of the author's; though to us, we will confess, it appears to be a very paragon of silliness and affectation. Our readers shall have the greater part of it. It begins thus:—

"She had a tall man's height, or more;
No bonnet screen'd her from the heat;
A long drab-colour'd cloak she wore,
A mantle reaching to her feet:
What other dress she had I could not know:
Only she wore a cap that was as white as snow.

Before me begging did she stand,
Pouring out sorrows like a sea;
Grief after grief:—on English land
Such woes I knew could never be;
And yet a boon I gave her; for the creature
Was beautiful to see, a weed of glorious feature!" Vol. i. p. 77, 78.

The poet, leaving this interesting person, falls in with two ragged boys at play, and "like that woman's face as gold is like to gold." Here is the conclusion of this memorable adventure:—

"They bolted on me thus, and lo!
Each ready with a plaintive whine;
Said I, 'Not half an hour ago
Your mother has had alms of mine.'
'That cannot be,' one answer'd; 'she is dead.'
'Nay; but I gave her pence, and she will buy you bread.'

'She has been dead, Sir, many a day.'
'Sweet boys, you're telling me a lie;
'It was your mother, as I say—'
And in the twinkling of an eye,
'Come, come!' cried one; and, without more ado,
'Off to some other play they both together flew." Vol. i. p. 79.

"Alice Fell" is a performance of the same order. The poet, driving into Durham in a postchaise, hears a sort of scream; and calling to the post-boy to stop, finds a little girl crying on the back of the vehicle.

"'My cloak!' the word was last and first,
And loud and bitterly she wept,
As if her very heart would burst;
And down from off the chaise she leapt.

'What ails you, child?' She sobb'd, 'Look here!'
I saw it in the wheel entangled;
A weather-beaten rag as e'er
From any garden scarecrow dangled." Vol. i. p. 85, 86.

They then extricate the torn garment, and the good-natured bard takes the child into the carriage along with him. The narrative proceeds—

"'My child, in Durham do you dwell?'
She check'd herself in her distress,
And said, 'My name is Alice Fell;
I'm fatherless and motherless.

And I to Durham, Sir, belong.'
And then, as if the thought would choke
Her very heart, her grief grew strong;
And all was for her tatter'd cloak.

The chaise drove on; our journey's end
Was nigh; and, sitting by my side,
As if she'd lost her only friend
She wept, nor would be pacified.

Up to the tavern door we post;
Of Alice and her grief I told;
And I gave money to the host,
To buy a new cloak for the old.

'And let it be of duffil grey,
As warm a cloak as man can sell!'
Proud creature was she the next day,
The little orphan, Alice Fell!" Vol. i. p. 87, 88.

If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult on the public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted.

After this follows the longest and most elaborate poem in the volume, under the title of "Resolution and Independence." The poet, roving about on a common one fine morning, falls into pensive musings on the fate of the sons of song, which he sums up in this fine distich:—

"We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness." Vol. i. p. 92.

In the midst of his meditations—

"I saw a man before me unawares:
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

Motionless as a cloud the old man stood;
That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
And moveth altogether, if it move at all:
At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conn'd,
As if he had been reading in a book:
And now such freedom as I could I took:
And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
'This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.'

'What kind of work is that which you pursue?
This a lonesome place for one like you.'
He answer'd me *with pleasure and surprise;*
And there was, while he spake, a fire about his eyes,
He told me, *that he to this pond had come*
To gather leeches, being old and poor:
Employment hazardous and wearisome!
And he had many hardships to endure:
From pond to pond he roam'd, from moor to moor,
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance:
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance." Vol. i. pp. 92—95.

Notwithstanding the distinctness of this answer, the poet, it seems, was so wrapped up in his own moody fancies, that he could not attend to it.

"And now, not knowing what the old man had said,
My question eagerly did I renew,
'How is it that you live, and what is it you do?'
He with a smile did then his words repeat:
And said, that, *gathering leeches*, far and wide
He travelled: stirring thus *about his feet*
The waters of the ponds where they abide.
'*Once I could meet with them on every side;*
But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.'" Vol. i. pp. 96, 97.

This very interesting account, which he is lucky enough at last to comprehend, fills the poet with comfort and admiration; and, quite glad to find the old man so cheerful, he resolves to take a lesson of contentedness from him; and the poem ends with this pious ejaculation:—

"God," said I, "be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor." Vol. i. p. 97.

We defy the bitterest enemy of Mr. Wordsworth to produce any thing at all parallel to this from any collection of English poetry, or even from the specimens of his friend Mr. Southey. The volume ends with some

sonnets, in a very different measure, of which we shall say something by and by.

The first poems in the second volume were written during a tour in Scotland. The first is a very dull one about Rob Roy; but the title that attracted us most was, "An Address to the Sons of *Burns*, after visiting their Father's Grave." Never was any thing, however, more miserable. This is one of the four stanzas:—

> "Strong bodied if ye be to bear
> Intemperance with less harm, beware!
> But if your father's wit ye share,
> Then, then indeed,
> Ye sons of Burns! for watchful care
> There will be need." Vol. ii. p. 29.

The next is a very tedious, affected performance, called "The Yarrow Unvisited." The drift of it is, that the poet refused to visit this celebrated stream, because he had "a vision of his own" about it, which the reality might perhaps undo; and for this no less fantastical reason —

> "Should life be dull, and spirits low,
> 'Twill soothe us in our sorrow,
> That earth has something yet to show,
> The bonny holms of Yarrow!" Vol. ii. p. 35.

After this we come to some ineffable compositions, which the poet has simply entitled, "Moods of my own Mind." One begins —

> "O Nightingale! thou surely art
> A creature of a fiery heart—
> Thou sing'st as if the god of wine
> Had help'd thee to a valentine." Vol. ii. p. 42.

This is the whole of another —

> "My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!
> The child is father of the man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety." Vol. ii. p. 44.

A third, "On a Sparrow's Nest," runs thus:—

> "Look, five blue eggs are gleaming there!
> *Few visions have I seen more fair,*
> *Nor many prospects of delight*
> More pleasing than that simple sight." Vol. ii. p. 53.

The charm of this fine prospect, however, was, that it reminded him of another nest which his sister Emmeline and he had visited in their childhood.

> "She look'd at it as if she fear'd it;
> Still wishing, dreading to be near it:
> Such heart was in her, being then
> A little prattler among men," &c. Vol. ii. p. 54.

We have, then, a rapturous mystical ode to the Cuckoo; in which the author, striving after force and originality, produces nothing but absurdity.

> "O Cuckoo! shall I call thee bird,
> Or but a wandering voice?" Vol. ii. p. 57.

And then he says, that the said voice seemed to pass from hill to hill, "about and all about!" — Afterwards he assures us, it tells him "in the vale of visionary hours," and calls it a darling; but still insists, that it is

> "No bird; but an invisible thing,
> A voice—a mystery." Vol. ii. p. 58.

It is afterwards "a hope; and "a love;" and, finally,

> "O blessed *bird!* the earth we pace
> Again appears to be
> An unsubstantial fairy place,
> That is fit home for thee!" Vol. ii. p. 59.

After this there is an address to a butterfly, whom he invites to visit him, in these simple strains:—

> "This plot of orchard ground is ours;
> My trees they are, my sister's flowers;
> Stop here whenever you are weary." Vol. ii. p. 61.

We come next to a long story of a "Blind Highland Boy," who lived near an arm of the sea, and had taken a most unnatural desire to venture on that perilous element. His mother did all she could to prevent him; but one morning, when the good woman was out of the way, he got into a vessel of his own, and pushed out from the shore.

> "In such a vessel ne'er before
> Did human creature leave the shore." Vol. ii. p. 72.

And then we are told, that if the sea should get rough, "a bee-hive would be ship as safe." — "But say, what was it?" a poetical interlocutor is made to exclaim most naturally; and here followeth the answer, upon which all the pathos and interest of the story depend,

> "A Household Tub, like one of those
> Which women use to wash their clothes!" Vol. ii. p. 72.

This, it will be admitted, is carrying the matter as far as it will well go; nor is there any thing,—down to the wiping of shoes, or the evisceration of chickens,—which may not be introduced in poetry, if this is tolerated. A boat is sent out and brings the boy ashore, who being tolerably frightened, we suppose, promises to go to sea no more; and so the story ends.

Then we have a poem, called "The Green Linnet," which opens with the poet's telling us,—

> "A whispering leaf is now my joy,
> And then a bird will be the *toy*
> That doth my fancy *tether*." Vol. ii. p. 79.

And closes thus,—

> "While thus before my eyes he gleams,
> A brother of the leaves he seems;
> When in a moment forth *he teems*
> His little song in gushes;
> As if it pleas'd him to disdain
> And mock the form which he did feign,
> While he was dancing with the train
> Of leaves among the bushes." Vol. ii. p. 81.

The next is called "Star Gazers." A set of people peeping through a telescope all seem to come away disappointed with the sight; whereupon thus sweetly moraliseth our poet:—

" Yet, showman, where can lie the cause? shall thy implement have blame,
A boaster that, when he is tried, fails and is put to shame?
Or is it good as others are, and be their eyes in fault?
Their eyes, or minds? or, finally, is this resplendent vault?

Or, is it rather, that conceit, rapacious is and strong,
And bounty never yields so much but it seems to do her wrong?
Or, is it, that when human souls a journey long have had,
And are returned into themselves, they cannot but be sad?" Vol. ii. p. 88.

There are then some really sweet and amiable verses on a French lady, separated from her own children, fondling the baby of a neighbouring cottager;—after which we have this quintessence of unmeaningness, entitled " Foresight."

" That is work which I am rueing—
Do as Charles and I are doing!
Strawberry blossoms, one and all,
We must spare them—here are many;
Look at it—the flower is small,
Small and low, though fair as any:
Do not touch it! Summers two
I am older, Anne, than you.
Pull the primrose, sister Anne!
Pull as many as you can.

Primroses, the spring may love them—
Summer knows but little of them:
Violets do what they will,
Wither'd on the ground must lie;
Daisies will be daisies still;
Daisies they must live and die:
Fill your lap and fill your bosom,
Only spare the strawberry blossom!" Vol. ii. pp. 115, 116.

Afterwards come some stanzas about an echo repeating a cuckoo's voice; here is one for a sample:—

" Whence the voice? from air or earth?
This the cuckoo cannot tell;
But a startling sound had birth,
As the bird must know full well." Vol. ii. p. 123.

Then we have elegiac stanzas " To the Spade of a Friend," beginning—

" Spade! with which Wilkinson hath till'd his lands,"

—but too dull to be quoted any further.

After this there is a Minstrel's Song, on the Restoration of Lord Clifford the Shepherd, which is in a very different strain of poetry; and then the volume is wound up with an " Ode," with no other title but the motto, *Paulo majora canamus.* This is, beyond all doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication. We can pretend to give no analysis or explanation of it;—our readers must make what they can of the following extracts:—

" —But there's a tree, of many one,
A single field which I have look'd upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" Vol. ii. p. 150.

" O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benedictions: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of childhood, whether fluttering or at rest,
With new-born hope for ever in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surpris'd:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish us, and make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor man nor boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence, in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither.
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

Vol. ii. pp. 154—156.

We have thus gone through this publication, with a view to enable our readers to determine, whether the author of the verses which have now been exhibited, is entitled to claim the honours of an improver or restorer of our poetry, and to found a new school to supersede or new model all our maxims on the subject. If we were to stop here, we do not think that Mr. Wordsworth, or his admirers, would have any reason to complain; for what we have now quoted is undeniably the most peculiar and characteristic part of his publication, and must be defended and applauded, if the merit or originality of his system is to be seriously maintained. In our own opinion, however, the demerit of that system cannot be fairly appreciated, until it be shown that the author of the bad verses which we have already extracted can write good verses when he pleases; and that, in point of fact, he does always write good verses, when, by any accident, he is led to abandon his system, and to transgress the laws of that school which he would fain establish on the ruin of all existing authority.

The length to which our extracts and observations have already extended necessarily restrains us within more narrow limits in this part of

our citations; but it will not require much labour to find a pretty decided contrast to some of the passages we have already detailed. The song on the restoration of Lord Clifford is put into the mouth of an ancient minstrel of the family; and in composing it, the author was led, therefore, almost irresistibly, to adopt the manner and phraseology that is understood to be connected with that sort of composition, and to throw aside his own babyish incidents and fantastical sensibilities. How he has succeeded, the reader will be able to judge from the few following extracts. The poem opens in this spirited manner: —

> " High in the breathless hall the minstrel sate,
> And Emont's murmur mingled with the song.—
> The words of ancient time I thus translate,
> A festal strain that hath been silent long.
> From town to town, from tower to tower,
> The red rose is a gladsome flower.
> Her thirty years of winter past,
> The red rose is revived at last;
> She lifts her head for endless Spring,
> For everlasting blossoming!" Vol. ii. pp. 128, 129.

After alluding, in a very animated manner, to the troubles and perils which drove the youth of the hero into concealment, the minstrel proceeds: —

> " Alas! when evil men are strong
> No life is good, no pleasure long.
> The boy must part from Mosedale's groves,
> And leave Blencathera's rugged coves,
> And quit the flowers that summer brings
> To Glenderamakin's lofty springs;
> Must vanish, and his careless cheer
> Be turned to heaviness and fear.
> —Give Sir Launcelot Threlkeld praise!
> Hear it, good man, old in days!
> Thou tree of covert and of rest
> For this young bird that is distrest,
> Among thy branches safe he lay,
> And he was free to sport and play,
> When falcons were abroad for prey." Vol. ii. pp. 133, 134.

The poem closes in this manner: —

> " —Now another day is come,
> Fitter hope, and nobler doom:
> He hath thrown aside his crook,
> And hath buried deep his book;
> Armour rusting in his halls
> On the blood of Clifford calls:—
> ' Quell the Scot!' exclaims the lance;
> ' Bear me to the heart of France!'
> Is the longing of the shield—
> Tell thy name, thou trembling field;
> Field of death, where'er thou be,
> Groan thou with our victory!
> Happy day, and mighty hour,
> When our shepherd, in his power,
> Mail'd and hors'd, with lance and sword,
> To his ancestors restor'd,
> Like a re-appearing star,
> Like a glory from afar,
> First shall head the flock of war!"

Alas! the fervent harper did not know
That for a tranquil soul the lay was framed,
Who, long compell'd in humble walks to go,
Was softened into feeling, sooth'd, and tamed.

In him the savage virtue of the race,
Revenge, and all ferocious thoughts, were dead:
Nor did he change; but kept in lofty place
The wisdom which adversity had bred.

Glad were the vales, and every cottage hearth;
The Shepherd Lord was honour'd more and more:
And, ages after he was laid in earth,
'The good Lord Clifford' was the name he bore."

Vol. i. pp. 136—138.

All English writers of sonnets have imitated Milton; and, in this way, Mr. Wordsworth, when he writes sonnets, escapes again from the trammels of his own unfortunate system; and the consequence is, that his sonnets are as much superior to the greater part of his other poems, as Milton's sonnets are superior to his. We give the following "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic:" —

"Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee;
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest child of Liberty.
She was a maiden city, bright and free;
No guile seduced, no force could violate;
And when she took unto herself a mate
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.
And what if she had seen those glories fade,
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay,
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid
When her long life hath reach'd its final day:
Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade
Of that which once was great is pass'd away." Vol. i. p. 132.

The following is entitled "London:" —

"Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on itself did lay." Vol. i. p. 140.

We make room for this other; though the four first lines are bad, and "week-day man" is by no means a Miltonic epithet.

"I griev'd for Buonaparte, with a vain
And an unthinking grief! The vital blood
Of that man's mind what can it be? What food
Fed his first hopes? What knowledge could he gain?
'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.

Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
By which true sway doth mount; this is the stalk
True power doth grow on; and her rights are these." Vol. i. p. 130.

When we look at these, and many still finer passages, in the writings of this author, it is impossible not to feel a mixture of indignation and compassion, at that strange infatuation which has bound him up from the fair exercise of his talents, and withheld from the public the many excellent productions that would otherwise have taken the place of the trash now before us. Even in the worst of these productions, there are, no doubt, occasional little traits of delicate feeling and original fancy; but these are quite lost and obscured in the mass of childishness and insipidity with which they are incorporated; nor can any thing give us a more melancholy view of the debasing effects of this miserable theory, than that it has given ordinary men a right to wonder at the folly and presumption of a man gifted like Mr. Wordsworth, and made him appear, in his second avowed publication, like a bad imitator of the worst of his former productions.

We venture to hope, that there is now an end of this folly; and that, like other follies, it will be found to have cured itself by the extravagancies resulting from its unbridled indulgence. In this point of view, the publication of the volumes before us may ultimately be of service to the good cause of literature. Many a generous rebel, it is said, has been reclaimed to his allegiance by the spectacle of lawless outrage and excess presented in the conduct of the insurgents; and we think there is every reason to hope, that the lamentable consequences which have resulted from Mr. Wordsworth's open violation of the established laws of poetry will operate as a wholesome warning to those who might otherwise have been seduced by his example, and be the means of restoring to that ancient and venerable code its due honour and authority.*

SOUTHEY.†

We admire the genius of Mr. Southey; we reverence the lofty principles, and we love the tenderness of heart, that are visible in all his productions. But we are heartily provoked at his conceit and bad taste, and quite wearied out with the perversity of his manifold affectations. Not many poets, dead or living, have given proofs of a finer fancy, or drawn more copiously from the stores of a rich and cultivated imagination: still fewer have maintained a sublimer tone of sentiment, — or pictured, in more enchanting colours, the simple and innocent affections of our nature; and none has ever "made these rich gifts poor" by such an obstinate strain of childish affectation; or so perversely defrauded the world of the delight, and himself of the glory, which they were intended by nature to produce.

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* See Vol. xxiv. p. 1. Vol. xxv. p. 355. and Vol. xxxvii. p. 449., in which Wordsworth's other works are reviewed.

† Southey's Curse of Kehama. — Vol. xvii. p. 429. February, 1811.

It is this mixed feeling of provocation and delight, that has given that contradictory character to our observations on Mr. Southey's former productions; which, we fear, may have brought our judgment into disrepute with the more uncharitable part of our readers. Our praise and our blame, we suspect, have appeared to be both too strong, to be justly applicable to one and the same performance; and we have been accused, alternately, of malice and of partiality, by those who will not understand, that a long poem may afford matter both for just ridicule and for just admiration. Mr. Southey's case, indeed, we have always considered as an extreme one; and, however awkwardly the censure and applause may stand together in our pages, we must be permitted to say, that nothing could be more sincere and conscientious than our expression of both these feelings; and that it appears to us, that no other expressions could have done full justice to the extraordinary performances by which they were excited. It is Mr. Southey himself that is the grand inconsistent; and the more truly we are charmed by the brilliancy of his imagination, and the truth and delicacy of his feelings, the more we must be offended by the wilful deformities by which he has rendered vain the combination fo so many beauties.

Mr. Southey, of course, despises equally our censure and our advice; and we have no quarrel with him for this. We have been too long conversant with the untractable generation of authors to expect that our friendly expostulations should have any effect upon them,—except as exponents of the silent, practical judgment of the public. To that superior tribunal, however, we do think ourselves entitled to refer; and while we, who profess the stately office of correcting and instructing, are yet willing, in most things, to bow to its authority, we really cannot help thinking, that a poet, whose sole object is to give delight and to gain glory, ought to show something of the same docility.

There is, indeed, another and a final appeal—to Posterity,—from the benefit of which we are very far from wishing to exclude any unfortunate persons whose circumstances may reduce them to rely on it. But the cases, we believe, are wonderfully rare, in which that mysterious and inaccessible Judge has ever reversed the *unfavourable* sentences of the ordinary jurisdictions; and there seems even to be great reason for thinking, that such reversals will be still fewer in time to come. Without resting much upon the superior intelligence of the present age, we believe we may safely pass a large encomium on its indulgence; and may be fairly allowed to doubt, whether any time is at all likely to come, in which every sort of merit will be so sure of being detected and extolled, in spite, and sometimes in consequence, of the incongruities and deformities with which it may be associated. Things are wonderfully changed in this respect, since a licentious and illiterate age withheld from Milton the fame which its successor was so proud to bestow. Poetry is read now, we suppose, by very nearly ten times as many persons; and fifty times as many think themselves judges of poetry; and are eager for an opportunity to glorify themselves as its patrons, by exaggerating the merit of some obscure or dubious writer, in whose reputation they may be entitled to share by contributing to raise it. Thus, in our own time, we have had Mrs. H. More patronising Mrs. Yearsley the milkwoman; and Mr. Capel Loff bringing forward Mr. Bloomfield the shoemaker; and Mr. Raymond Grant challenging immortality for Mr. Dermody the drunkard; and Sir James Bland Burgess and Sir Brooke Boothby, and Miss Aikin and Miss Holford, and fifty others, patronising themselves, and each other, with the

most laudable zeal and exemplary activity. Now, whatever may be its other effects, it is certain that all this competition for patronage and discovery ensures notoriety, and a certain *viaticum* of praise, to almost every poetical adventurer; and takes away almost the posibility of that neglect which, in former times, stood so often in the way, not merely of reputation, but of fair trial. That a great deal of false reputation will be raised, under such circumstances, and various lots of undeserved and perishable praise be awarded by vanity, partiality, and caprice, cannot indeed be doubted; but it is not so easy to conceive, that any real merit should escape detection, or miss honour, in this sanguine search after excellence, — that the active manure which quickens so many colder seeds should not stimulate the more sensitive fibres of genius, — or that the bright sun, which gilds, with a passing glory, the idle weeds of literature, should fail to kindle into beauty the splendid blossoms of poetry.

But, leaving Mr. Southey the full benefit of his chance with posterity, it is enough for us to observe, that his appeal to the present generation has now been made with sufficient fulness and deliberation; and that the decision, as we understand it, has not only confirmed, but outgone, all that we had predicted as to the fatal effects of his peculiarities. During the last fifteen years, he has put forth (besides the present work) three very long poems, — no one of which, we think, can be said to have succeeded. That they have all had some readers, and some admirers, we do not mean to dispute; nay, there are many who pass for tolerable judges in such matters, who think they have had a very strange and unaccountable success: but the author, and his admirers, and his booksellers, are not by any means of that opinion; and we, for our parts, have no hesitation in saying, that they have not had nearly so much success as it appears to us that they deserve. There have been three editions, we believe, of Joan of Arc — two of Thalaba — and one only of Madoc, — though the last has been six years in the hands of the public, — and of a public which has called, during the same interval, for more than ten editions of the Farmer's Boy, and five or six, if we do not mistake, of the Wanderer of Switzerland.

This, we think, is pretty strong testimony against the *taste* of a poet, whose *genius*, we believe, was never lowered, even among those who neglect him, to a comparison with that of Mr. Bloomfield, or Mr. Montgomery. But the inference is still stronger, when we consider the circumstances under which this testimony has been given. Mr. Southey is no longer in his noviciate. Though still in the vigour of life, he has been a full-fledged and industrious author for nearly twenty years; and has not wanted, as we ourselves can testify, for advice and admonition, both laudatory and vituperative. With all these advantages, however, and means of improvement, we are afraid that he is rather less in favour with the public than he was at the beginning of his career. His first poem was decidedly more successful than his second, — and his second than his third: yet his genius certainly is in no degree impaired; and his judgment and powers of execution may be fairly presumed to have received some improvement. When we find him rather on the decline, therefore, in public estimation, and discover that his fame, instead of gathering brightness as his course is prolonged, seems rather to waste away and wax dim, it is difficult to suppose that this proceeds from any thing but the misapplication of acknowledged powers, and the obstinacy with which he has persisted in errors of which he received very early warning. The public is naturally disposed to be very kind to the errors of youthful

genius; and was entitled, in this case, to look for the speedy correction of faults, for which mere inexperience could scarcely at any time be received as an apology. If such faults, therefore, are long persisted in, their indulgence will be gradually exhausted. What was at first ascribed to inadvertence, will now be referred, with some appearance of justice, to bad taste and perversity; and the reader will turn away, disappointed and disgusted, from an ostentatious display of absurdities that are no longer original.

There is one other peculiarity in the state of Mr. Southey's poetical reputation, from which, we think, that he should take warning, while it is yet time. His admirers, we fear, are not the very best sort of admirers. In so far as we have been able to gather, there are but few persons of cultivated taste and sober judgment in his train; and his glories are celebrated, we think, chiefly by the young, the enthusiastic, and the uninstructed; — persons whose fancies are easily captivated with glitter, exaggeration, and novelty, and whose exuberant sensibility is apt to flame out at the approach even of the false fire of bombast and affectation. Not many of the admirers of the ancient or the modern classics are admirers of Mr. Southey; and many of those who applaud him the most warmly, can discover no merit in those celebrated performances. We do not not propose by any means to deny that there are many dull and weak persons among the professed admirers of Homer and Virgil; and that there is much natural feeling in the description of readers whom we have supposed to take delight in Mr. Southey. But it is not of good augury, we think, for his future fame, that his supporters should be all of this description; and that almost all those should be against him, who have any decided relish for what has hitherto been found enduring in poetry. So, however, we take the case very nearly to be. Almost all nice critics and fastidious judges, and the greater part indeed of men of improved and delicate taste, not only refuse to admire Mr. Southey and his colleagues, but treat them with absolute contempt and derision — wonder at such of their friends as profess to think favourably of their genius — and look upon the circumstance of their having made a kind of party in the literary world, as one of the most humiliating events in the recent history of that great society. For our own part, we are a good deal less difficult; and shall continue to testify in favour of Mr. Southey's talents and genius, as resolutely as against his peculiarities and affectations; — considering it indeed as our chief duty, in this matter, to counteract the neglect into which he seems to be falling, both by endeavouring to correct the faults by which it is provoked, and by pointing out the excellences by which those faults are at once enhanced and redeemed.

But, though we cannot sympathise with the undiscriminating scorn and sweeping reprobation which Mr. Southey meets with in very respectable quarters, we think we can see very clearly how such feelings should have been excited; and are very ready to enter into sentiments, which we think, at the same time, have in this instance been carried greatly too far. Mr. Southey's faults are peculiarly glaring; and to all improved understandings, we admit, peculiarly offensive: — but they are combined, in him, with great gifts and great acquirements; and ought not to be alone remembered in his final accounting with the public. We have said enough of these faults on former occasions; and shall not enter again at large upon the invidious task of classing or illustrating them. If we were to express them all in one word — that word should be *childishness;* — and indeed it is very curious to trace the effects of this quality in all the departments of his poetry.

His taste in description is as remarkably childish, as his powers of execution, in this branch of his art, are rare and admirable. Every thing, in his pictures, is gaudy and glittering, and fantastically exaggerated and contrasted. His landscapes are full of coloured light, and gems, and metallic splendour; and sparkle with such portentous finery, as to remind us of the old-fashioned grottos and shell-work of the last generation, or the gilded caverns and full-lighted transparencies of the opera-house. His excessive love of the marvellous and gigantic is a symptom not less decisive; and his delineations of persons and of affection are still more strongly marked with the same infantine character. He seems to think grown men and women too corrupt and hardened for poetical purposes; — and, therefore, all his interesting personages lisp like sucklings; and his unamiable ones are, as nearly as possible, such sort of monsters as nurses imagine to frighten naughty boys into obedience. There is little other passion in his poetry, than what arises from the natural affection of fathers and daughters, or brothers and sisters; and from that calm, pure, subdued sort of love which may be indulged by dutiful children under the immediate inspection of their parents. All their pleasures, and pastimes, and occupations, too, are evidently borrowed from the same age of innocence; — and the picture of society that is offered to us rarely extends beyond the domestic privacy of a small secluded family.

We do not say, that all this may not be very sweet and interesting, — or even that Mr. Southey does not often make us feel how very beautifully it may be represented; — but the tone is too weak to strike with sufficient force on the ear of an ordinary reader; and is by far too uniform not to pall upon any one who is doomed to pursue it through a series of long poems. There is no variety of human character in all Mr. Southey's productions. Men are never brought forward to contend with men in the management of great affairs; or to display those social or lofty qualities by which they are enabled, in real life, to attach or to command their fellows. If Mr. Southey wants a living instance of the value of such elements, we would remind him of the signal success with which Mr. Scott has given the strong interest of reality to his most fanciful delineations, by this perpetual interposition of intelligible motives and familiar principles; and has, at the same time, imparted a spirit, and force, and variety to his pictures, by keeping his readers perpetually engaged with events and persons that bear a character of historical importance; instead of soothing them, like the author before us, with the virtues and affections, as well as the marvels and legends of the nursery.

All this, however, would have been greatly more tolerable, if the poet had condescended to assume the lowly tone that is suitable to such subjects and feelings. If he had been contented to leave the loftier regions of the Epic to more potent and daring spirits, and addressed himself to youths and virgins in soft and unambitious strains, we have no doubt that he would soon have found a fit and willing audience, and been left, by those who were careless of such themes, to pursue them in his own circle without let or molestation. But he has imprudently challenged the attention of a far wider and less tractable auditory; — he has come with his whistle, and his gilded book of fairy tales, into the assemblies of bearded men, and audibly undervalued all other instruments and studies. The kind of conceit, indeed, and arrogance, that is visible in this author and his associates, is still more provoking than their childishness, — or rather, is that which makes their childishness so offensive. While gravely preferring the tame vulgarity of our old ballads, to the nervous and refined

verses of Pope or Johnson, they lay claim, not to indulgence, but to admiration; and treat almost the whole of our classical poets with the most supercilious neglect; while they speak in an authoritative tone of the beauties of George Wither and Henry More. With such ludicrous auxiliaries, they wage a desperate war on the established system of public taste and judgment, — and waste their great talents in an attempt, the success of which is as hopeless as it would be lamentable, and which all their genius cannot save from being ridiculous.

The last unfortunate accompaniment of Mr. Southey's childishness is the perpetual artifice and effort that is visible in every part of his performances. We do not mean to say, that he has not great facility of diction, and copiousness of imagery; but there is always too apparent a resolution to make the most of every thing — a kind of rhetorical exaggeration (according to his own notions of rhetoric) — a determination to miss no opportunity of being fine and striking—and an anxiety to present every thing, great or small, under the most imposing and advantageous aspect. The general principle, no doubt, is highly laudable, and, we suppose, is common to all who write for glory; but what we complain of is, that it is by far too visible, and too indiscriminately indulged, in the works of this author. If there be any room or apology whatever for a description, it is sure to be thrust in — elaborately finished — and extended to a vast length; and if any striking sentiment or event is about to be brought forward, such a note of preparation is sounded, and so much care taken to ensure it a favourable and conspicuous introduction, as to give the reader rather a distressing impression of the labour the author has bestowed on his composition, and of the great value he attaches even to the meanest of his ingredients.

It is difficult for us to believe, that Mr. Southey has ever rejected or suppressed any idea that he thought might be introduced with the smallest prospect of success; or has ever regarded any of so little importance, as to deserve only a slight and incidental notice. In his poetry, therefore, we have not a selection of the thoughts and images that have occurred to him; but we seem to have them *all* — and to have them all dilated and worked up with nearly the same fond and indiscriminate anxiety. He seems, in short, to have as excessive a love for his own genius as Ovid, or the long-winded Spaniards and Italians of the sixteenth century; and to think as little of sparing his readers any thing which his own reading or reflection had once suggested to his imagination. The effect of all this is, not only to make his poetry very diffuse, and to give it a general air of heaviness and labour, but to deprive his felicities of their greatest grace, and to render his failures inexpiable.

There is nothing so charming in poetry, as that appearance of perfect ease and carelessness which makes the result, perhaps of long study, appear like the spontaneous effusion of a superior or inspired mind; and at once raises the reader, as it were, into the society of a higher order of beings, whose common language and habits of thought bear a stamp of vigour and sublimity far above the reach of ordinary mortals. This charm, however, is destroyed, the moment that we are permitted to look behind the scenes, and to catch a peep of the operose and toilsome machinery by which the effect is produced. Nor can any secret be of more importance for a poet to keep from his readers, than that of the time he has spent, and the difficulties he has encountered, in the course of his composition. This maxim, we think, was well understood by the older writers; among whom it is rare to find any marks of extraordinary pains, either to intro-

duce or to bring out their favourite images or conceptions. We do not speak of the labour occasionally bestowed, and visibly enough, on their diction or versification; but, with reference to the more substantial qualities of thought and fancy, we think there are few poets of established character who can be reproached, in any considerable degree, with the fault we impute to Mr. Southey. On the contrary, it will be found, that almost all their beauties appear to have been produced by accident; and that their fine passages are both brought in and concluded, with an apparent unsconsciousness of their superior merit. They are neither introduced with any sort of parade, nor dwelt upon with any protracted complacency. They open quietly upon the eye of the reader as he advances: and disappear again long before he is satiated with beholding them. He is never diverted from his path to catch a striking view of them; nor made to linger in its windings till all their sweetness is exhausted.

The practice of Mr. Southey, and of many other modern writers of inferior note, is directly the reverse of this; nor indeed is there any fault more characteristic of our modern poetry, and perhaps of our literature in general, than the offensive anxiety that our authors are continually showing to make the most of their talents and their materials — to miss no occasion to astonish and transport the reader,— and to take special care that nothing which they think beautiful or important shall pass unobserved, or be dismissed till its merits have been fully pointed out, and made apparent to the most negligent and inattentive. It is this miserable trick of over-rating the importance of all our conceptions, that has made our recent literature so intolerably diffuse and voluminous. No man, for example, has now the forbearance to write essays as short as Hume's, even if he had talents to make them as good; nor will any one be contented with stating his views and arguments in a popular and concise manner, and leaving them to their fate; but we must have long speculative introductions — illustrations and digressions — objections anticipated and answered — verbose apologies, at once fulsome and modest — practical inferences — historical deductions — and predictions as to the effect of our doctrines, or the neglect of them, on the fate of men, and of the universe, in all time coming. In poetry, again, a great part of our modern authors seem equally averse to throw away the rubbish of their imaginations; and when they do hit upon any thing which seems to them of more than ordinary value, never fail to exert themselves notably to ensure the reader's attention to it. It is introduced either with startling abruptness, or slow and pompous preparation; and is turned into all possible lights, and repeated in all possible forms, and with every possible encouragement and suasory to admiration. The consequence of all which is, that the whole spirit, lightness, and nature of the thought is extinguished; and the reader left oppressed with a sense of fatigue, heaviness, and confusion.

But if this tone of perpetual effort and ambition prove so injurious to the effect of the very passages in which a poet is most successful, it is a thousand times worse where he experiences any failure or miscarriage. If a man says a dull thing in a low tone and quiet manner, it is very likely to escape notice, — and is almost sure to escape derision; but if he utter an inconceivable stupidity in an emphatic and arrogant accent, and, after taking great pains to prepare his hearers for something very impressive, — the ridicule is irresistible, and its effect scarcely ever to be got over. Now, the poets who are at so much trouble to force all their bright

thoughts on the notice of their readers, *sometimes* mistake for a bright thought what appears to others purely nonsensical or affected; and thus give rise to associations that are neither very favourable to their reputation, nor very easily dissolved. Where there is no visible effort, though there may be dulness, there can scarcely be failure; and the reader who is not gratified, may still retain his faith in the taste and judgment of the author, —and impute his want of brilliancy to an intractable subject, or a moment of negligence or inattention: but, the instant that he fails in a strenuous and open attempt on his admiration, there is an end to apology and toleration;—there is then evident proof of weakness, where a feat of strength was intended, — and of open and irreconcilable differences as to the fundamental articles of his mystery. In our classical poets, accordingly, though there is abundance of flat passages, we scarcely recollect any instance of egregious failure. In Mr. Southey and Mr. Wordsworth, and in the German dramatists whom they seem to copy, we meet with them perpetually: nor is it possible, even for great genius and originality, to prevent the combination of childishness with an unremitting effort at force and sublimity, from producing passages which chill the unwary reader with a mixture of shame, provocation, and compassion. *

CAMPBELL. †

We rejoice once more to see a polished and pathetic poem, in the old style of English pathos and poetry. This is of the pitch of the Castle of Indolence, and the finer parts of Spenser; with more feeling, in many places, than the first, and more condensation and diligent finishing than the latter. If the true tone of nature be not every where maintained, it gives place, at least, to art only, and not to affectation— and, least of all, to affectation of singularity or rudeness.

Beautiful as the greater part of this volume is, the public taste, we are afraid, has of late been too much accustomed to beauties of a more obtrusive and glaring kind, to be fully sensible of its merit. Without supposing that this taste has been in any great degree vitiated, or even imposed upon, by the babyism or the antiquarianism which have lately been versified for its improvement, we may be allowed to suspect, that it has been somewhat dazzled by the splendour, and bustle, and variety of the most popular of our recent poems; and that the more modest colouring of truth and nature may, at this moment, seem somewhat cold and feeble. We have endeavoured, on former occasions, to do justice to the force and originality of some of these brilliant productions, as well as to the genius (fitted for much higher things) of their authors — and have little doubt of being soon called upon for a renewed tribute of applause. But we cannot help saying, in the mean time, that the work before us belongs to

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* For reviews of Southey's other works, see Vol. i. p. 63. Vol. vii. p. 1. Vol. xi. p. 31. Vol. xxii. p. 447. Vol. xxv. p. 1. Vol. xxvi. p. 441. Vol. xxviii. p. 151. Vol. xxxv. p. 422. Vol. l. p. 528.

† Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale; and other Poems. By Thomas Campbell. — Vol. xiv. p. 1. April, 1809.

a class which comes nearer to our conception of pure and perfect poetry. Such productions do not, indeed, strike so strong a blow as the vehement effusions of our modern *Trouveurs;* but they are calculated, we think, to please more deeply, and to call out more permanently, those trains of emotion, in which the delight of poetry will probably be found to consist. They may not be so loudly nor so universally applauded; but their fame will probably endure longer, and they will be oftener recalled to mingle with the reveries of solitary leisure, or the consolations of real sorrow.

There is a sort of poetry, no doubt, as there is a sort of flowers, which can bear the broad sun and the ruffling winds of the world, — which thrive under the hands and eyes of indiscriminating multitudes, and please as much in hot and crowded saloons, as in their own sheltered repositories; but the finer and the purer sorts blossom only in the shade, and never give out their sweets but to those who seek them amid the quiet and seclusion of the scenes which gave them birth. There are torrents and cascades which attract the admiration of tittering parties, and of which even the busy must turn aside to catch a transient glance; but "the haunted stream" steals through a still and a solitary landscape; and its beauties are never revealed, but to him who strays, in calm contemplation, by its course, and follows its wanderings with undistracted and unimpatient admiration. There is a reason, too, for all this, which may be made more plain than by metaphors.

The highest delight which poetry produces, does not arise from the mere passive perception of the images or sentiments which it presents to the mind, but from the excitement which is given to its own eternal activity, and the character which is impressed on the train of its spontaneous conceptions. Even the dullest reader generally sees more than is directly presented to him by the poet; but a lover of poetry always sees infinitely more; and is often indebted to his author for little more than an impulse, or the key-note of a melody, which his fancy makes out for itself. Thus, the effect of poetry depends more on the *fruitfulness* of the impressions to which it gives rise, than on their own individual force or novelty; and the writers who possess the greatest powers of fascination, are not those who present us with the greatest number of lively images or lofty sentiments, but who most successfully impart their own impulse to the current of our thoughts and feelings, and give the colour of their brighter conceptions to those which they excite in us. Now, upon a little consideration, it will probably appear, that the dazzling, and the busy and marvellous scenes which constitute the whole charm of some poems, are not so well calculated to produce this effect, as those more intelligible delineations which are borrowed from ordinary life, and coloured from familiar affections. The object is, to awaken in our minds a train of kindred emotions, and to excite our imaginations to work out for themselves a tissue of pleasing or impressive conceptions. But it seems obvious, that this is more likely to be accomplished by surrounding us gradually with those objects, and involving us in those situations, with which we have long been accustomed to associate the feelings of the poet, — than by startling us with some tale of wonder, or attempting to engage our affections for personages, of whose character and condition we are little able to form any conception. These, indeed, are more sure than the other to produce a momentary sensation, by the novelty and exaggeration with which they are commonly attended; but their power is spent at the first impulse: they do not strike root and germinate in the mind, like the seeds of its native feelings; nor propagate throughout the

imagination that long series of delightful movements, which is only excited when the song of the poet is the echo of our familiar feelings.

It appears to us, therefore, that by far the most powerful and enchanting poetry is that which depends for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations, and not on the strangeness of its incidents, or the novelty or exotic splendour of its scenes and characters. The difficulty is, no doubt, to give the requisite force, elegance, and dignity to these ordinary subjects, and to win a way for them to the heart, by that true and concise expression of natural emotion, which is among the rarest gifts of inspiration. To accomplish this, the poet must do much; and the reader something. The one must practise enchantment, and the other submit to it. The one must purify his conceptions from all that is low or artificial; and the other must lend himself gently to the impression, and refrain from disturbing it by any movement of worldly vanity, derision, or hardheartedness. In an advanced state of society, the expression of simple emotion is so obstructed by ceremony, or so distorted by affectation, that though the sentiment itself be still familiar to the greater part of mankind, the verbal representation of it is a task of the utmost difficulty. One set of writers, accordingly, finding the whole language of men and women too sophisticated for this purpose, have been obliged to go to the nursery for a more suitable phraseology; another has adopted the style of courtly Arcadians; and a third, that of mere Bedlamites. So much more difficult is it to express natural feelings, than to narrate battles, or describe prodigies!

But even when the poet has done his part, there are many causes which may obstruct his immediate popularity. In the first place, it requires a certain degree of sensibility to perceive his merit. There are thousands of people who can admire a florid description, or be amused with a wonderful story, to whom a pathetic poem is quite unintelligible. In the second place, it requires a certain degree of leisure and tranquillity. A picturesque stanza may be well enough relished while the reader is getting his hair combed; but a scene of tenderness or emotion will not do for the corner of a crowded drawing-room. Finally, it requires a certain degree of courage to proclaim the merits of such a writer. Those who feel the most deeply, are most given to disguise their feelings; and derision is never so agonising as when it pounces on the wanderings of misguided sensibility. Considering the habits of the age in which we live, therefore, and the fashion, which, though not immutable, has for some time run steadily in an opposite direction, we should not be much surprised if a poem, whose chief merit consisted in its pathos, and in the softness and exquisite tenderness of its representations of domestic life and romantic seclusion, should meet with less encouragement than it deserves. If the volume before us were the work of an unknown writer, indeed, we should feel no little apprehension about its success; but Mr. Campbell's name has power, we are persuaded, to ensure a very partial and a very general attention to whatever it accompanies, and, we would fain hope, influence enough to reclaim the public taste to a juster standard of excellence. The success of his former work, indeed, goes far to remove our anxiety for the fortune of this. It contained, perhaps, more brilliant and bold passages than are to be found in the poem before us; but it was inferior, we think, in softness and beauty; and, being necessarily of a more desultory and didactic character, had far less pathos and interest than this very simple tale. Those who admired the Pleasures of Hope for the passage about Brama and Kosciusko, may perhaps

be somewhat disappointed with the gentler tone of Gertrude; but those who loved that charming work for its pictures of infancy and of maternal and connubial love, may read on here with the assurance of a still higher gratification.

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We close this volume, on the whole, with feelings of regret for its shortness, and of admiration for the genius of its author. There are but two noble sorts of poetry, — the pathetic and the sublime; and we think he has given very extraordinary proofs of his talents for both. There is something, too, we will venture to add, in the style of many of his conceptions, which irresistibly impresses us with the conviction, that he can do much greater things than he has hitherto accomplished; and leads us to regard him, even yet, as a poet of still greater promise than performance. It seems to us as if the natural force and boldness of his ideas were habitually checked by a certain fastidious timidity, and an anxiety about the minor graces of correct and chastened composition. Certain it is, at least, that his greatest and most lofty flights have been made in those smaller pieces, about which, it is natural to think, he must have felt least solicitude; and that he has succeeded most splendidly where he must have been most free from the fear of failure, We wish any praises or exhortations of ours had the power to give him confidence in his own great talents; and hope earnestly, that he will now meet with such encouragement, as may set him above all restraints that proceed from apprehension, and induce him to give free scope to that genius, of which we are persuaded that the world has hitherto seen rather the grace than the richness.*

PROFESSOR WILSON.†

This is a new recruit to the company of lake poets;—and one who, from his present bearing, promises, we think, not only to do them good service, and to rise to high honours in the corps; but to raise its name, and advance its interests, even among the tribes of the unbelievers. Though he wears openly the badge of their peculiarities, and professes the most humble devotion to their great captain, Mr. Wordsworth, we think he has kept clear of several of the faults that may be imputed to his preceptors; and assumed, upon the whole, a more attractive and conciliating air, than the leaders he has chosen to follow. He has the same predilection, indeed, for engrafting powerful emotions on ordinary occurrences; and the same tendency to push all his emotions a great

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* I have not thought it necessary to add to the above beautiful remarks on the character of Campbell's poetry the outline which the reviewer has given of the poem of "Gertrude," or the passages he has selected to justify the decision he has pronounced. The concluding remarks on the genius and talents of Mr. Campbell are in accordance with the sentiments frequently expressed in the Edinburgh Review in reference to that delightful poet. (See a review of his "Specimens of British Poetry," Vol. xxxi. and of his "Theodric," Vol. xli. p. 271.)

† Wilson's Isle of Palms, and other Poems. — Vol. xix. p. 373. February, 1812.

deal too far—the same disdain of all worldly enjoyments and pursuits—and the same occasional mistakes, as to energy and simplicity of diction, which characterise the works of his predecessors. But he differs from them in this very important particular, that though he does generally endeavour to raise a train of lofty and pathetic sensations upon very trifling incidents and familiar objects, and frequently pursues them to a great height of extravagance and exaggeration, he is scarcely ever guilty of the offence of building them upon a foundation that is ludicrous or purely fantastic. He makes more, to be sure, of a sleeping child, or a lonely cataract—and flies into greater raptures about female purity and moonlight landscapes, and fine dreams, and flowers, and singing-birds—than most other poets permit themselves to do,—though it is of the very essence of poetry to be enraptured with such things:—but he does not break out into any ecstacies about spades or sparrows' eggs—or men gathering leeches—or women in duffle cloaks—or plates and porringers—or washing tubs—or any of those baser themes which poetry was always permitted to disdain, without any impeachment of her affability, till Mr. Wordsworth thought fit to force her into an acquaintance with them.

Though Mr. Wilson may be extravagant, therefore, he is not perverse; and though the more sober part of his readers may not be able to follow him to the summit of his sublimer sympathies, they cannot be offended at the invitation, or even refuse to grant him their company to a certain distance on the journey. The objects for which he seeks to interest them are all objects of natural interest; and the emotions which he connects with them are, in some degree, associated with them in all reflecting minds. It is the great misfortune of Mr. Wordsworth, on the contrary, that he is exceedingly apt to make choice of subjects which are not only unfit in themselves to excite any serious emotion, but naturally present themselves to ordinary minds as altogether ridiculous; and, consequently, to revolt and disgust his readers by an appearance of paltry affectation, or incomprehensible conceit. We have the greatest respect for the genius of Mr. Wordsworth, and the most sincere veneration for all we have heard of his character; but it is impossible to contemplate the injury he has done to his reputation by this poor ambition of originality, without a mixed sensation of provocation and regret. We are willing to take it for granted, that the spades, and the eggs, and the tubs which he commemorates, actually suggested to him all the emotions and reflections of which he has chosen to make them the vehicles; but they surely are not the only objects which have suggested similar emotions; and we really cannot understand why the circumstance of their being quite unfit to suggest them to any other person should have recommended them as their best accompaniments in an address to the public. We do not want Mr. Wordsworth to write like Pope or Prior, nor to dedicate his muse to subjects which he does not himself think interesting. We are prepared, on the contrary, to listen with a far deeper delight to the songs of his mountain solitude, and to gaze on his mellow pictures of simple happiness and affection, and his lofty sketches of human worth and energy; and we only beg, that we may have these nobler elements of his poetry, without the debasement of childish language, mean incidents, and incongruous images. We will not run the risk of offending him, by hinting at the prosperity of Scott, or Campbell, or Crabbe; but he cannot be scandalised, we think, if we refer him to the example of the dutiful disciple and fervent admirer who is now

before us; and entreat him to consider whether he may not conscientiously abstain from those peculiarities which even Mr. Wilson has not thought it safe to imitate.

Mr. Wilson is not free from some of the faults of diction which, we think, belong to his school. He is occasionally mystical, and not seldom childish; but he has less of these peculiarities than most of his associates: and there is one more important fault from which, we think, he has escaped altogether. We allude now to the offensive assumption of exclusive taste, judgment, and morality, which pervades most of the writings of this tuneful brotherhood. There is a tone of tragic, keen, and intolerant reprobation in all the censures they bestow, that is not a little alarming to ordinary sinners. Every thing they do not like is accursed, and pestilent, and inhuman; and they can scarcely differ from any body upon a point of criticism, politics, or metaphysics, without wondering what a heart he must have; and expressing, not merely dissent, but loathing and abhorrence. Neither is it very difficult to perceive, that they think it barely possible for any one to have any just notion of poetry, any genuine warmth of affection or philanthropy, or any large views as to the true principles of happiness and virtue, who does not agree with them in most of their vagaries, and live a life very nearly akin to that which they have elected for themselves. The inhabitants of towns, therefore, and most of those who are engaged in the ordinary business or pleasures of society, are cast off without ceremony as *demoralised* and *denaturalised* beings; and it would evidently be a considerable stretch of charity in these new apostles of taste and wisdom, to believe that any one of this description could have a genuine relish for the beauties of nature—could feel any ardent or devoted attachment to another,—or even comprehend the great principles upon which private and public virtue must be founded. Mr. Wilson, however, does not seem to believe in the necessity of this extraordinary monopoly; but speaks with a tone of indulgent and open sociality, which is as engaging as the jealous and assuming manner of some of his models is offensive. The most striking characteristic, indeed, as well as the great charm of the volume before us, is the spirit of warm and unaffected philanthropy which breathes over every page of it—that delighted tenderness with which the writer dwells on the bliss of childhood, and the dignity of female innocence—and that young enthusiasm which leads him to luxuriate in the description of beautiful nature and the joys of a life of retirement. If our readers can contrive to combine these distinguishing features with our general reference of the author to the school of Wordsworth and Southey, they will have as exact a conception of his poetical character as can be necessary to prepare them for a more detailed account of the works that are now offered to their perusal.*

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* See another review of Wilson's poetry, equally complimentary, Vol. xxvi. p. 458.

BARRY CORNWALL.*

A good imitation of what is excellent is generally preferable to original mediocrity:—only it provokes dangerous comparisons—and makes failures more conspicuous—and sometimes reminds us that excellent things are imitable by their faults—and that too diligent a study of the wonders of Art is apt to lead into some forgetfulness of the beauties of Nature.

In spite of all these dangers, we must say that the author before us is a very good imitator—and unquestionably, for the most part, of very good models. His style is chiefly moulded, and his versification modulated, on the pattern of Shakspeare, and the other dramatists of that glorious age—particularly Marlow, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger. He has also copied something from Milton and Ben Jonson, and the amorous cavaliers of the Usurpation—and then passing disdainfully over all the intermediate writers, has flung himself fairly into the arms of Lord Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Leigh Hunt.—This may be thought, perhaps, rather a violent transition; and likely to lead to something of an incongruous mixture. But the materials really harmonise very tolerably; and the candid reader of the work will easily discover the secret of this amalgamation.

In the *first* place, Mr. Cornwall is himself a poet—and one of no mean rate;—and not being a maker of parodies or centos, he does not imitate by indiscriminately caricaturing the prominent peculiarities of his models, or crowding together their external or mechanical characteristics—but merely disciplines his own genius in the school of theirs—and tinges the creatures of his fancy with the colouring which glows in theirs. In the *next* place, and what is much more important, it is obvious that a man may imitate Shakspeare and his great compeers, without presuming to rival their variety or universality, and merely by endeavouring to copy one or two of their many styles and excellences.—This is the case with Mr. C. He does not meddle with the thunders and lightnings of the mighty poet, and still less with his boundless humour and fresh-springing merriment. He has nothing to do with Falstaff or Silence; and does not venture himself in the lists with Macbeth, or Lear, or Othello. It is the tender, the sweet, and the fanciful only, that he aspires to copy—the girlish innocence and lovely sorrow of Juliet, Imogen, Perdita, or Viola—the enchanted solitude of Prospero and his daughter—the etherial loves and jealousies of Oberon and Titania, and those other magical scenes, all perfumed with love and poetry, and breathing the spirit of a celestial spring, which lie scattered in every part of his writings.—The genius of Fletcher, perhaps, is more akin to Mr. C.'s muse of imitation, than the soaring and "extravagant spirit" of Shakspeare; and we think we can trace, in more places than one, the impression which his fancy has received from the patient suffering and sweet desolation of Aspatia, in his Maid's tragedy. It is the youthful Milton only that he has presumed to copy—the Milton of Lycidas and Comus, and the Arcades, and the Seraphic Hymns—not the lofty and austere Milton of the Paradise. From

* A Sicilian Story, and other Poems. By Barry Cornwall.—Vol. xxxiii. p. 144. January, 1820.

Jonson, we think, he has imitated some of those exquisite songs and lyrical pieces that lie buried in the rubbish of his masks, and which continued to be the models for all such writings down to the period of the Restoration. There are no traces, we think, of Dryden, or Pope, or Young,—or of any body else indeed, till we come down to Lord Byron, and our other tuneful contemporaries.—From what we have already said, it will be understood, that Mr. C. has not thought of imitating all Byron, any more than all Shakspeare. He leaves untouched the mockery and misanthropy, as well as much of the force and energy, of the noble Lord's poetry—and betakes himself only to its deep sense of beauty, and the grace and tenderness that are so often and so strangely interwoven with those less winning characteristics.—It is the poetry of Manfred, of Parisina, of Haidée and Thyrsa, that he aims at copying, and not the higher and more energetic tone of the Corsair, or Childe Harold, or Don Juan. He has indeed borrowed the manner of this last piece in two of the poems in this little volume—but has shown no great aptitude for wit or sarcasm, and has succeeded only in the parts that are pathetic and tender. There is a great deal of the diction of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and some imitation of their beauties: but we think the natural bent of his genius is more like that of Leigh Hunt than any other author. He has the same play of fancy, and the same capacity of deep and delicate feeling, together with the same relish for the old Italian poetry, and the plain and simple pathos of Dante and Boccacio.—We doubt, however, whether he has equal force of original talent, or whether he could have written any thing so good, on the whole, as the beautiful story of Rimini. But he has better taste and better judgment—or, what perhaps is but saying the same thing, he has less affectation, and far less conceit. He has scarcely any other affectation, indeed, than is almost necessarily implied in a sedulous imitator of difficult models—and no visible conceit at all. On the contrary, we cannot help supposing him to be a very natural and amiable person, who has taken to write poetry, more for the love he bears it, than the fame to which it may raise him—who cares nothing for the sects and factions into which the poetical world may be divided;—but, regarding himself as a debtor to every writer who has given him pleasure, desires nothing better than to range freely over the whole Parnassian garden, "stealing and giving odour" with a free spirit and a grateful and joyous heart.

It is this apparent devotion to the purer part of his art, and the total exclusion of all contentious and dogmatical matter, that constitutes the great charm of his writing. The fever of party spirit, and the bitterness of speculative contention, have of late years infected all our literature; and Poetry itself, instead of being the balm and anodyne of minds, hurt and ruffled with the rugged tasks and angry struggles of the world, has too often been made the vehicle of moral and political animosity, religious antipathy, and personal offence. We cannot always, with all our philosophy, escape the soil and tarnish of those contagious pursuits; but it is delightful to turn from them awhile, to the unalloyed sweets of such poetry as Mr. Cornwall's; and to refresh our fancies, and strengthen and compose our good affections, among the images of love and beauty, and gentle sympathy and sorrow, with which it every where presents us.

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If it be the peculiar province of Poetry to give delight, this author should rank very high among our poets; and, in spite of his neglect of the terrible passions, he *does* rank very high in our estimation. He has

a beautiful fancy and a beautiful diction—and a fine ear for the music of verse, and great tenderness and delicacy of feeling. He seems, moreover, to be altogether free from any tincture of bitterness, rancour, or jealousy; and never shocks us with atrocity, or stiffens us with horror, or confounds us with the dreadful sublimities of demoniacal energy. His soul, on the contrary, seems filled to overflowing with images of love and beauty, and gentle sorrows, and tender pity, and mild and holy resignation. The character of his poetry is to soothe, and melt, and delight: to make us kind, and thoughtful, and imaginative—to purge away the dregs of our earthly passions, by the refining fires of a pure imagination, and to lap us up from the eating cares of life, in visions so soft and bright, as to sink like morning dreams on our senses, and at the same time so distinct and truly fashioned upon the eternal patterns of nature, as to hold their place before our eyes long after they have again been opened on the dimmer scenes of the world.

Why this should not be thought the highest kind of poetry, we profess ourselves rather at a loss to explain;—and certainly are ourselves often in a mood to think that it is so; and to believe that the more tremendous agitations of the breast, to which the art has so often been made subservient, have attracted more admiration, and engrossed more talent, than ought in justice to have been assigned them. The real lovers of poetry, we suspect, will generally incline their ears most willingly to its softer and more winning strains—nor can we believe that it was for them that its more tumultuous measures were invented. Men of delicate sensibility and inflammable imaginations do not require the stronger excitement of those boisterous and agonising emotions, without which it may be difficult to rouse the sympathies of more tardy and rugged natures. The poetical temperament is intrinsically dreamy and contemplative; and subsists in passionate imaginings, and beautiful presentments of the fancy. Wrath, and scorn, and misanthropy, are scarcely among its natural elements. It has but little legitimate affinity with horror and agony, and none at all with aversion and disgust; nor is it easy to conceive that it should very long maintain its attraction where the predominating feelings it excites are those of dread, astonishment, and disdain. Some strong and gloomy spirits there may be, that really enjoy the stormy trouble of the elements; but the greater and the better part of the lovers of poetry will always be happy to escape to milder and more temperate regions, and to pursue their meditations among enchantments of a more engaging character, and forms of a gentler aspect.*

KEATS.†

We have been exceedingly struck with the genius which these volumes display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. That imitation of our older writers, and especially of our older

* The concluding paragraph of this critique is taken from a review of Cornwall's "Marcian Colonna," Vol. xxxiv. p. 449.

† Endymion, and other Poems. By John Keats.—Vol. xxxiv. p. 203. August, 1820.

dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry;—and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness, or richer in promise, than this which is now before us. Mr. Keats, we understand, is still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of the fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity. They manifestly require, therefore, all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt:—but we think it no less plain that they deserve it; for they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy, and so coloured and bestrewn with the flowers of poetry, that even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present. The models upon which he has formed himself, in the Endymion, the earliest and by much the most considerable of his poems, are obviously the Faithful Shepherdess of Fletcher, and the Sad Shepherd of Ben Jonson;—the exquisite metres and inspired diction of which he has copied with great boldness and fidelity,—and, like his great originals, has also contrived to impart to the whole piece that true rural and poetical air, which breathes only in them and in Theocritus,—which is at once homely and majestic, luxurious and rude, and sets before us the genuine sights and sounds and smells of the country, with all the magic and grace of Elysium. His subject has the disadvantage of being mythological; and in this respect, as well as on account of the raised and rapturous tone it consequently assumes, his poetry may be better compared perhaps to the Comus and the Arcades of Milton, of which also there are many traces of imitation. The great distinction, however, between him and these divine authors is, that imagination in them is subordinate to reason and judgment, while with him, it is paramount and supreme;—that their ornaments and images are employed to embellish and recommend just sentiments, engaging incidents, and natural characters, while his are poured out without measure or restraint, and with no apparent design but to unburden the breast of the author, and give vent to the overflowing vein of his fancy. The thin and scanty tissue of his story is merely the light frame-work on which his florid wreaths are suspended; and while his imaginations go rambling and entangling themselves every where, like wild honeysuckles, all idea of sober reason, and plan, and consistency, is utterly forgotten, and are "strangled in their waste fertility." A great part of the work, indeed, is written in the strangest and most fantastical manner that can be imagined. It seems as if the author had ventured every thing that occurred to him in the shape of a glittering image or striking expression—taking the first word that presented itself to make up a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images—a hint for a new excursion of the fancy—and so wandered on, equally forgetful whence he came, and heedless whither he was going, till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures, that multiplied as they extended, and were only harmonised by the brightness of their tints, and the graces of their forms. In this rash and headlong career he has of course many lapses and failures. There is no work, accordingly, from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule, or select more obscure, unnatural, or absurd passages. But we do not take *that* to be our office;—and just beg leave, on the contrary, to say, that any one who, on this account, would represent the whole poem

as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth.

It is, in truth, at least as full of genius as of absurdity; and he who does not find a great deal in it to admire and to give delight, cannot in his heart see much beauty in the two exquisite dramas to which we have already alluded, or find any great pleasure in some of the finest creations of Milton and Shakspeare. There are very many such persons, we verily believe, even among the reading and judicious part of the community—correct scholars we have no doubt many of them, and, it may be, very classical composers in prose and in verse—but utterly ignorant of the true genius of English poetry, and incapable of estimating its appropriate and most exquisite beauties. With that spirit we have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Keats is deeply imbued—and of those beauties he has presented us with many striking examples. We are very much inclined indeed to add, that we do not know any book which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm. The greater and more distinguished poets of our country have so much else in them to gratify other tastes and propensities, that they are pretty sure to captivate and amuse those to whom their poetry is but an hinderance and obstruction, as well as those to whom it constitutes their chief attraction. The interest of the stories they tell—the vivacity of the characters they delineate—the weight and force of the maxims and sentiments in which they abound—the very pathos and wit and humour they display, which may all and each of them exist apart from their poetry and independent of it, are quite sufficient to account for their popularity, without referring much to that still higher gift, by which they subdue to their enchantments those whose souls are attuned to the finer impulses of poetry. It is only where those other recommendations are wanting, or exist in a weaker degree, that the true force of the attraction, exercised by the pure poetry with which they are so often combined, can be fairly appreciated—where, without much incident or many characters, and with little wit, wisdom, or arrangement, a number of bright pictures are presented to the imagination, and a fine feeling expressed of those mysterious relations by which visible external things are assimilated with inward thoughts and emotions, and become the images and exponents of all passions and affections. To an unpoetical reader such passages always appear mere raving and absurdity—and to this censure a very great part of the volume before us will certainly be exposed, with this class of readers. Even in the judgment of a fitter audience, however, it must, we fear, be admitted, that, besides the riot and extravagance of his fancy, the scope and substance of Mr. Keat's poetry is rather too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent. He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible beings, and is too constantly rapt into an extramundane Elysium, to command a lasting interest with ordinary mortals—and must employ the agency of more varied and coarser emotions, if he wishes to take rank with the seducing poets of this or of former generations. There is something very curious too, we think, in the way in which he, and Mr. Barry Cornwall also, have dealt with the Pagan mythology, of which they have made so much use in their poetry. Instead of presenting its imaginary persons under the trite and vulgar traits that belong to them in the ordinary systems, little more is borrowed from these than the general

conception of their conditions and relations; and an original character and distinct individuality is bestowed upon them, which has all the merit of invention, and all the grace and attraction of the fictions on which it is engrafted. The ancients, though they probably did not stand in any great awe of their deities, have yet abstained very much from any minute or dramatic representation of their feelings and affections. In Hesiod and Homer, they are coarsely delineated by some of their actions and adventures, and introduced to us merely as the agents in those particular transactions; while in the Hymns, from those ascribed to Orpheus and Homer down to those of Callimachus, we have little but pompous epithets and invocations, with a flattering commemoration of their most famous exploits—and are never allowed to enter into their bosoms, or follow out the train of their feelings, with the presumption of our human sympathy. Except the love-song of the Cyclops to his Sea Nymph, in Theocritus—the Lamentation of Venus for Adonis, in Moschus—and the more recent Legend of Apuleius, we scarcely recollect a passage in all the writings of antiquity in which the passions of an immortal are fairly disclosed to the scrutiny and observation of men. The author before us, however, and some of his contemporaries, have dealt differently with the subject;—and, sheltering the violence of the fiction under the ancient traditionary fable, have created and imagined an entire new set of characters, and brought closely and minutely before us the loves and sorrows and perplexities of beings, with whose names and supernatural attributes we had long been familiar, without any sense or feeling of their personal character. We have more than doubts of the fitness of such personages to maintain a permanent interest with the modern public;—but the way in which they are here managed certainly gives them the best chance that now remains for them; and, at all events, it cannot be denied that the effect is striking and graceful. Mr. Keats has unquestionably a very beautiful imagination, and a great familiarity with the finest diction of English poetry; but he must learn not to misuse or misapply these advantages,—and neither to waste the good gifts of nature and study on intractable themes, nor to luxuriate too recklessly on such as are more suitable.

SHELLEY.*

Mr. Shelley's style is to poetry what astrology is to natural science,—a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions,—a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging its love of power and novelty at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects.

Poetry, we grant, creates a world of its own; but it creates it out of existing materials. Mr. Shelley is the maker of his own poetry—out of nothing. Not that he is deficient in the true sources of strength and

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* Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley.—Vol. xl. p. 494. July, 1825.

beauty, if he had given himself fair play (the volume before us, as well as his other productions, contains many proofs to the contrary): but in him, fancy, will, caprice, predominated over and absorbed the natural influences of things; and he had no respect for any poetry that did not strain the intellect as well as fire the imagination—and was not sublimed into a high spirit of metaphysical philosophy. Instead of giving a language to thought, or lending the heart a tongue, he utters dark sayings, and deals in allegories and riddles. His Muse offers her services to clothe shadowy doubts and inscrutable difficulties in a robe of glittering words, and to turn nature into a brilliant paradox. We thank him—but we must be excused. Where we see the dazzling beacon-lights streaming over the darkness of the abyss, we dread the quicksands and the rocks below. Mr. Shelley's mind was of "too fiery a quality" to repose (for any continuance) on the probable or the true—it soared "beyond the visible diurnal sphere," to the strange, the improbable, and the impossible. He mistook the nature of the poet's calling, which should be guided by involuntary, not by voluntary, impulses. He shook off, as an heroic and praiseworthy act, the trammels of sense, custom, and sympathy, and became the creature of his own will. He was "all air," disdaining the bars and ties of mortal mould. He ransacked his brain for incongruities, and believed in whatever was incredible. Almost all is effort, almost all is extravagant, almost all is quaint, incomprehensible, and abortive, from aiming to be more than it is. Epithets are applied, because they do not fit; subjects are chosen, because they are repulsive; the colours of his style, for their gaudy, changeful, startling effect, resemble the display of fire-works in the dark, and, like them, have neither durability, nor keeping, nor discriminate form. Yet Mr. Shelley, with all his faults, was a man of genius; and we lament that uncontrollable violence of temperament which gave it a forced and false direction. He has single thoughts of great depth and force, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness; and, in his smaller pieces, where he has attempted little, he has done most. If some casual and interesting idea touched his feelings or struck his fancy, he expressed it in pleasing and unaffected verse: but give him a larger subject, and time to reflect, and he was sure to get entangled in a system. The fumes of vanity rolled volumes of smoke, mixed with sparkles of fire, from the cloudy tabernacle of his thought. The success of his writings is therefore in general in the inverse ratio of the extent of his undertakings; inasmuch as his desire to teach, his ambition to excel, as soon as it was brought into play, encroached upon, and outstripped, his powers of execution.

Mr. Shelley was a remarkable man. His person was a type and shadow of his genius. His complexion, fair, golden, freckled, seemed transparent with an inward light, and his spirit within him

> ——"so divinely wrought,
> That you might almost say his body thought."

He reminded those who saw him of some of Ovid's fables. His form, graceful and slender, drooped like a flower in the breeze. But he was crushed beneath the weight of thought which he aspired to bear, and was withered in the lightning-glare of a ruthless philosophy! He mistook the nature of his own faculties and feelings — the lowly children of the valley, by which the skylark makes its bed, and the bee murmurs, for the proud cedar or the mountain-pine, in which the eagle builds its eyry,

" and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun." He wished to make of idle verse and idler prose the frame-work of the universe, and to bind all possible existence in the visionary chain of intellectual beauty —

> " More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
> Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
> Of scorch'd dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee."

Perhaps some lurking sense of his own deficiencies in the lofty walk which he attempted irritated his impatience and his desires ; and urged him on, with winged hopes, to atone for past failures, by more arduous efforts, and more unavailing struggles.

With all his faults, Mr. Shelley was an honest man. His unbelief and his presumption were parts of a disease, which was not combined in him either with indifference to human happiness, or contempt for human infirmities. There was neither selfishness nor malice at the bottom of his illusions. He was sincere in all his professions; and he practised what he preached — to his own sufficient cost. He followed up the letter and the spirit of his theoretical principles in his own person, and was ready to share both the benefit and the penalty with others. He thought and acted logically, and was what he professed to be — a sincere lover of truth, of nature, and of human kind. To all the rage of paradox he united an unaccountable candour and severity of reasoning: in spite of an aristocratic education, he retained in his manners the simplicity of a primitive apostle. An Epicurean in his sentiments, he lived with the frugality and abstemiousness of an ascetic. His fault was, that he had no deference for the opinions of others, too little sympathy with their feelings (which he thought he had a right to sacrifice, as well as his own, to a grand ethical experiment) — and trusted too implicitly to the light of his own mind, and to the warmth of his own impulses. He was indeed the most striking example we remember of the two extremes described by Lord Bacon as the great impediments to human improvement, the love of Novelty, and the love of Antiquity. " The first of these (impediments) is an extreme affection of two extremities, the one Antiquity, the other Novelty ; wherein it seemeth the children of Time do take after the nature and malice of the father. For as he devoureth his children, so one of them seeketh to devour and suppress the other ; while Antiquity envieth there should be new additions, and Novelty cannot be content to add, but it may deface. Surely the advice of the Prophet is the true direction in this matter: *Stand upon the old ways, and see which is the right and good way, and walk therein.* Antiquity deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon, and discover what is the best way ; but when the discovery is well taken, then to take progression. And to speak truly, *Antiquitas seculi Juventas mundi.* These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we count ancient, *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backwards from ourselves." (Advancement of Learning, Book I. p. 46.) — Such is the text; and Mr. Shelley's writings are a splendid commentary on one half of it. Considered in this point of view, his career may not be uninstructive even to those whom it most offended; and might be held up as a beacon and warning no less to the bigot than the sciolist. We wish to speak of the errors of a man of genius with tenderness. His nature was kind, and his sentiments noble; but in him the rage of free enquiry and private judgment amounted to a species of madness. Whatever was new, untried, unheard of, unauthorised, exerted a kind of fascination over his mind.

The examples of the world, the opinion of others, instead of acting as a check upon him, served but to impel him forward with double velocity in his wild and hazardous career. Spurning the world of realities, he rushed into the world of nonentities and contingencies, like air into a *vacuum*. If a thing was old and established, this was with him a certain proof of its having no solid foundation to rest upon; if it was new, it was good and right. Every paradox was to him a self-evident truth; every prejudice an undoubted absurdity. The weight of authority, the sanction of ages, the common consent of mankind, were vouchers only for ignorance, error, and imposture. Whatever shocked the feelings of others, conciliated his regard; whatever was light, extravagant, and vain, was to him a proportionable relief from the dulness and stupidity of established opinions. The worst of it however was, that he thus gave great encouragement to those who believe in all received absurdities, and are wedded to all existing abuses; his extravagance seeming to sanction their grossness and selfishness, as theirs were a full justification of his folly and eccentricity. The two extremes in this way often meet, jostle, and confirm one another. The infirmities of age are a foil to the presumption of youth; and "there the antics sit," mocking one another — the ape Sophistry pointing with reckless scorn at "palsied eld," and the bed-rid hag, Legitimacy, rattling her chains, counting her beads, dipping her hands in blood, and blessing herself from all change and from every appeal to common sense and reason! Opinion thus alternates in a round of contradictions: the impatience or obstinacy of the human mind takes part with, and flies off to one or other of the two extremes "of affection," and leaves a horrid gap, a blank sense and feeling in the middle, which seems never likely to be filled up, without a total change in our mode of proceeding. The martello-towers with which we are to repress, if we cannot destroy, the systems of fraud and oppression should not be castles in the air, or clouds in the verge of the horizon, but the enormous and accumulated pile of abuses which have arisen out of their own continuance. The principles of sound morality, liberty, and humanity, are not to be found only in a few recent writers, who have discovered the secret of the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers, but are truths as old as the creation. To be convinced of the existence of wrong, we should read history rather than poetry: the levers with which we must work out our regeneration are not the cobwebs of the brain, but the warm, palpitating fibres of the human heart. It is the collision of passions and interests, the petulance of party-spirit, and the perversities of self-will and self-opinion, that have been the great obstacles to social improvement — not stupidity or ignorance; and the caricaturing one side of the question and shocking the most pardonable prejudices on the other, is not the way to allay heats or produce unanimity. By flying to the extremes of scepticism, we make others shrink back, and shut themselves up in the strongholds of bigotry and superstition;— by mixing up doubtful or offensive matters with salutary and demonstrable truths, we bring the whole into question, fly-blow the cause, risk the principle, and give a handle and a pretext to the enemy to treat all philosophy and all reform as a compost of crude, chaotic, and monstrous absurdities. We thus arm the virtues as well as the vices of the community against us; we trifle with their understandings, and exasperate their self-love; we give to superstition and injustice all their old security and sanctity, as if they were the only alternatives of impiety and profligacy, and league the natural with the selfish prejudices of mankind in hostile array against us. To this

consummation, it must be confessed that too many of Mr. Shelley's productions pointedly tend. He makes no account of the opinions of others, or the consequences of any of his own; but proceeds—tasking his reason to the utmost to account for every thing, and discarding every thing as mystery and error for which he cannot account by an effort of mere intelligence — measuring man, providence, nature, and even his own heart, by the limits of the understanding—now hallowing high mysteries, now desecrating pure sentiments, according as they fall in with or exceeded those limits; and exalting and purifying, with Promethean heat, whatever he does not confound and debase.

Mr. Shelley died, it seems, with a volume of Mr. Keats's poetry grasped with one hand in his bosom! These are two out of four poets, patriots and friends, who have visited Italy within a few years, both of whom have been soon hurried to a more distant shore. Keats died young; and "yet his infelicity had years too many." A canker had blighted the tender bloom that o'erspread a face in which youth and genius strove with beauty. The shaft was sped — venal, vulgar, venomous, that drove him from his country, with sickness and penury for companions, and followed him to his grave. And yet there are those who could trample on the faded flower — men to whom breaking hearts are a subject of merriment — who laugh loud over the silent urn of Genius, and play out their game of venality and infamy with the crumbling bones of their victims! To this band of immortals a third has since been added! — a mightier genius, a haughtier spirit, whose stubborn impatience and Achilles-like pride only Death could quell. Greece, Italy, the world, have lost their poet-hero; and his death has spread a wider gloom, and been recorded with a deeper awe, than has waited on the obsequies of any of the many great who have died in our remembrance. Even detraction has been silent at his tomb; and the more generous of his enemies have fallen into the rank of his mourners. But he set like the sun in his glory; and his orb was greatest and brightest at the last, for his memory is now consecrated no less by freedom than genius. He probably fell a martyr to his zeal against tyrants. He attached himself to the cause of Greece, and dying, clung to it with a convulsive grasp, and has thus gained a niche in her history; for whatever *she* claims as hers is immortal, even in decay, as the marble sculptures on the columns of her fallen temples!

MRS. HEMANS.*

Women, we fear, cannot do every thing; nor even every thing they attempt. But what they can do, they do, for the most part, excellently — and much more frequently with an absolute and perfect success, than the aspirants of our rougher and more ambitious sex. They cannot, we think, represent naturally the fierce and sullen passions of men—nor their coarser vices—nor even scenes of actual business or contention—and the mixed motives, and strong and faulty characters, by which affairs of

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* Records of Woman; the Forest Sanctuary, and other Poems. By Felicia Hemans. — Vol. l. p. 32. October, 1829.

moment are usually conducted on the great theatre of the world. For much of this they are disqualified by the delicacy of their training and habits, and the still more disabling delicacy which pervades their conceptions and feelings; and from much they are excluded by their actual inexperience of the realities they might wish to describe—by their substantial and incurable ignorance of business—of the way in which serious affairs are actually managed—and the true nature of the agents and impulses that give movement and direction to the stronger currents of ordinary life. Perhaps they are also incapable of long moral or political investigations, where many complex and indeterminate elements are to be taken into account, and a variety of opposite probabilities to be weighed before coming to a conclusion. They are generally too impatient to get at the ultimate results, to go well through with such discussions; and either stop short at some imperfect view of the truth, or turn aside to repose in the shadow of some plausible error. This, however, we are persuaded, arises entirely from their being seldom set on such tedious tasks. Their proper and natural business is the practical regulation of private life, in all its bearings, affections, and concerns; and the questions with which they have to deal in that most important department, though often of the utmost difficulty and nicety, involve, for the most part, but few elements; and may generally be better described as delicate than intricate;—requiring for their solution rather a quick tact and fine perception than a patient or laborious examination. For the same reason they rarely succeed in long works, even on subjects the best suited to their genius; their natural training rendering them equally averse to long doubt and long labour.

For all other intellectual efforts, however, either of the understanding or the fancy, and requiring a thorough knowledge either of man's strength or his weakness, we apprehend them to be, in all respects, as well qualified as their brethren of the stronger sex; while, in their perceptions of grace, propriety, ridicule—their power of detecting artifice, hypocrisy, and affectation—the force and promptitude of their sympathy, and their capacity of noble and devoted attachment, and of the efforts and sacrifices it may require, they are, beyond all doubt, our superiors.

Their business being, as we have said, with actual or social life, and the colours it receives from the conduct and dispositions of individuals, they unconsciously acquire at a very early age, the finest perception of character and manners, and are almost as soon instinctively schooled in the deep and dangerous learning of feeling and emotion; while the very minuteness with which they make and meditate on these interesting observations, and the finer shades and variations of sentiment which are thus treasured and recorded, trains their whole faculties to a nicety and precision of operation, which often discloses itself to advantage in their application to studies of a very different character. When women, accordingly, have turned their minds—as they have done but too seldom—to the exposition or arrangement of any branch of knowledge, they have commonly exhibited, we think, a more beautiful accuracy, and a more uniform and complete justness of thinking, than their less discriminating brethren. There is a finish and completeness about every thing they put out of their hands, which indicates not only an inherent taste for elegance and neatness, but a habit of nice observation, and singular exactness of judgment.

It has been so little the fashion, at any time, to encourage women to write for publication, that it is more difficult than it should be, to prove

these truths by examples. Yet there are enough, within the reach of a very careless and superficial glance over the open field of literature, to enable us to explain, at least, and illustrate, if not entirely to verify, our assertions. No *man*, we will venture to say, could have written the Letters of Madame de Sevigné, or the Novels of Miss Austin, or the Hymns and Early Lessons of Mrs. Barbauld, or the Conversations of Mrs. Marcet. These performances, too, are not only essentially and intensely feminine, but they are, in our judgment, decidedly more perfect than any masculine productions with which they can be brought into comparison. They accomplish more completely all the ends at which they aim, and are worked out with a gracefulness and felicity of execution which excludes all idea of failure, and entirely satisfies the expectations they may have raised. We might easily have added to these instances. There are many parts of Miss Edgeworth's earlier stories, and of Miss Mitford's sketches and descriptions, and not a little of Mrs. Opie's, that exhibit the same fine and penetrating spirit of observation, the same softness and delicacy of hand, and unerring truth of delineation, to which we have alluded as characterising the purer specimens of female art. The same distinguishing traits of a woman's spirit are visible through the grief and the piety of Lady Russel, and the gaiety, the spite, and the venturesomeness of Lady Mary Wôrtley. We have not as yet much female poetry; but there is a truly feminine tenderness, purity, and elegance, in the Psyche of Mrs. Tighe, and in some of the smaller pieces of Lady Craven. On some of the works of Madame de Staël—her Corinne especially—there is a still deeper stamp of the genius of her sex. Her pictures of its boundless devotedness—its depth and capacity of sùffering—its high aspirations—its painful irritability, and inextinguishable thirst for emotion, are powerful specimens of that morbid anatomy of the heart, which no hand but that of a woman's was fine enough to have laid open, or skilful enough to have recommended to our sympathy and love. There is the same exquisite and inimitable delicacy, if not the same power, in many of the happier passages of Madame de Souza and Madame Cottin—to say nothing of the more lively and yet melancholy records of Madame de Staal, during her long penance in the court of the Duchesse de Maine.

But we are preluding too largely; and must come at once to the point to which the very heading of this article has already admonished the most careless of our readers that we are tending. We think the poetry of Mrs. Hemans a fine exemplification of Female Poetry—and we think it has much of the perfection which we have ventured to ascribe to the happier productions of female genius.

It may not be the best imaginable poetry, and may not indicate the very highest or most commanding genius; but it embraces a great deal of that which gives the very best poetry its chief power of pleasing; and would strike us, perhaps, as more impassioned and exalted, if it were not regulated and harmonised by the most beautiful taste. It is infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender—touching, perhaps, and contemplative, rather than vehement and overpowering; and not only finished throughout with an exquisite delicacy, and even serenity of execution, but informed with a purity and loftiness of feeling, and a certain sober and humble tone of indulgence and piety, which must satisfy all judgments, and allay the apprehensions of those who are most afraid of the passionate exaggerations of poetry. The diction is always beautiful, harmonious, and free—and the themes, though of infinite variety, uniformly treated with a grace, originality, and judgment, which mark the same master hand. These

themes she has borrowed, with the peculiar interest and imagery that belong to them, from the legends of different nations, and the most opposite states of society; and has contrived to retain much of what is interesting and peculiar in each of them, without adopting, along with it, any of the revolting or extravagant excesses which may characterise the taste or manners of the people or the age from which it has been derived. She has thus transfused into her German or Scandinavian legends the imaginative and daring tones of the originals, without the mystical exaggerations of the one, or the painful fierceness and coarseness of the other; she has preserved the clearness and elegance of the French, without their coldness or affectation; and the tenderness and simplicity of the early Italians, without their diffuseness or languor. Though occasionally expatiating, somewhat fondly and at large, amongst the sweets of her own planting, there is, on the whole, a great condensation and brevity in most of her pieces, and, almost without exception, a most judicious and vigorous conclusion. The great merit, however, of her poetry, is undoubtedly in its tenderness and its beautiful imagery. The first requires no explanation; but we must be allowed to add a word as to the peculiar charm and character of the latter.

It has always been our opinion, that the very essence of poetry, apart from the pathos, the wit, or the brilliant description, which may be embodied in it, but may exist equally in prose, consists in the fine perception and vivid expression of that subtle and mysterious analogy which exists between the physical and the moral world—which makes outward things and qualities the natural types and emblems of inward gifts and emotions, and leads us to ascribe life and sentiment to every thing that interests us in the aspects of external nature. The feeling of this analogy, obscure and inexplicable as the theory of it may be, is so deep and universal in our nature, that it has stamped itself on the ordinary language of men of every kindred and speech: and that to such an extent, that one half of the epithets by which we familiarly designate moral and physical qualities, are in reality so many metaphors, borrowed reciprocally, upon this analogy, from those opposite forms of existence. The very familiarity, however, of the expression, in these instances, takes away its poetical effect—and indeed, in substance, its metaphorical character. The original sense of the word is entirely forgotten in the derivative one to which it has succeeded; and it requires some etymological recollection to convince us that it was originally nothing else than a typical or analogical illustration. Thus, we talk of a penetrating understanding, and a furious blast—a weighty argument, and a gentle stream—without being at all aware that we are speaking in the language of poetry, and transferring qualities from one extremity of the sphere of being to another. In these cases, accordingly, the metaphor, by ceasing to be felt, in reality ceases to exist; and the analogy, being no longer intimated, of course can produce no effect. But whenever it is intimated, it does produce an effect; and that effect, we think, is poetry.

It has substantially two functions, and operates in two directions. In the *first* place, it strikes vividly out, and flashes at once on our minds, the conception of an inward feeling or emotion, which it might otherwise have been difficult to convey, by the presentment of some bodily form or quality, which is instantly felt to be its true representative, and enables us to fix and comprehend it with a force and clearness not otherwise attainable; and, in the *second* place, it vivifies dead and inanimate matter with the attributes of living and sentient mind, and fills the whole visible

universe around us with objects of interest and sympathy, by tinging them with the hues of life, and associating them with our own passions and affections. This magical operation the poet too performs, for the most part, in one of two ways,—either by the direct agency of similes and metaphors more or less condensed or developed, or by the mere graceful presentment of such visible objects on the scene of his passionate dialogues or adventures, as partake of the character of the emotion he wishes to excite, and thus form an appropriate accompaniment or preparation for its direct indulgence or display. The former of those methods has, perhaps, been most frequently employed, and certainly has most attracted attention. But the latter, though less obtrusive, and perhaps less frequently resorted to of set purpose, is, we are inclined to think, the most natural and efficacious of the two; and is often adopted, we believe, unconsciously, by poets of the highest order;—the predominant emotion of their minds overflowing spontaneously on all the objects which present themselves to their fancy, and calling out from them, and colouring with its own hues, those that are naturally emblematic of its character, and in accordance with its general expression. It would be easy to show how habitually this is done by Shakspeare, and Milton especially, and how much many of their finest passages are indebted both for force and richness of effect to this general and diffusive harmony of the external character of their scenes with the passions of their living agents—this harmonising and appropriate glow with which they kindle the whole surrounding atmosphere, and bring all that strikes the sense into unison with all that touches the heart.

But it is more to our present purpose to say, that we think the fair writer before us is eminently a mistress of this poetical secret; and, in truth, it was solely for the purpose of illustrating this great charm and excellence in her imagery, that we have ventured upon this little dissertation. Almost all her poems are rich with fine descriptions, and studied over with images of visible beauty. But these are never idle ornaments. All her pomps have a meaning; and her flowers and her gems are arranged, as they are said to be among Eastern lovers, so as to speak the language of truth and passion. This is peculiarly remarkable in some little pieces, which seem at first sight to be purely descriptive—but are soon found to tell upon the heart, with a deep moral and pathetic impression. But it is a truth nearly as conspicuous in the greater part of her productions; where we scarcely meet with any striking sentiment that is not ushered in by some such symphony of external nature, and scarcely a lovely picture that does not serve as a foreground to some deep or lofty emotion.

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We have seen too much of the perishable nature of modern literary fame, to venture to predict to Mrs. Hemans that hers will be immortal, or even of very long duration. Since the beginning of our critical career, we have seen a vast deal of beautiful poetry pass into oblivion, in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber; and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the fields of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride. We need say

nothing of Milman, and Croly, and Atherstone, and Hood, and a legion of others, who, with no ordinary gifts of taste and fancy, have not so properly survived their fame, as been excluded by some hard fatality from what seemed their just inheritance. The two who have the longest withstood this rapid withering of the laurel, and with the least marks of decay on their branches, are Rogers and Campbell; neither of them, it may be remarked, voluminous writers, and both distinguished rather for the fine taste and consummate elegance of their writings, than for that fiery passion, and disdainful vehemence, which seemed for a time to be so much more in favour with the public.

If taste and elegance, however, be titles to enduring fame, we might venture securely to promise that rich boon to the author before us; who adds to those great merits a tenderness and loftiness of feeling, and an ethereal purity of sentiment, which could only emanate from the soul of a woman. She must beware of becoming too voluminous; and must not venture again on any thing so long as the "Forest Sanctuary." But, if the next generation inherit our taste for short poems, we are persuaded it will not readily allow her to be forgotten. For we do not hesitate to say, that she is, beyond all comparison, the most touching and accomplished writer of occasional verses that our literature has yet to boast of.

SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE AND MR. MARTIN.*

THOUGH the productions of the pencil do not form immediate objects of our peculiar jurisdiction, they are indirectly and unavoidably brought within the sphere of its judgments by means of the critical discussions to which they give rise. We cannot decide upon the principles by which the merits of a picture, or of a master, are tried, without the privilege of referring to our own perceptions of pictorial beauty. What is depicted on the canvass, is necessarily brought under our review by what is impressed on the page; and, when criticism is, on all sides, busy with the works of a living master, we are in some measure called to examine them, that we may be able to determine as to the skill and fairness of the strictures we peruse. It will not, therefore, we hope, be thought that we have either unwittingly or improperly wandered from our legitimate province, in availing ourselves of the appearance of a publication on British Artists, to make a few remarks on the works of one of the class, every where talked of and criticised — the distinguished painter of *Belshazzar's Feast.*

The interest excited in the British public by this, and others of Mr. Martin's works, is such, we believe, as never before was awakened by those of any other painter. It is true that, by a certain class of critics, he has been charged with many and considerable faults; but, though we should admit the justness of their censures, it must be evident that, for the production of an admiration so enthusiastic in the greater number, including many equally competent to judge aright, he must be allowed the possession of excellences of a very high, if not indeed of the highest

* Lives of the most eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects. — Vol. xlix. p. 459. June, 1829.

class. The causes of those varying and opposite judgments and feelings present an interesting field of critical enquiry; and in order that we may obtain a clearer view of it, and of the peculiar merits of Mr. Martin, we shall attempt a sort of parallel between them and those of a contemporary of unmingled popularity, but of a very different class, — the President of the Royal Academy. In this, we shall discuss the nature of those claims to our admiration presented in the pieces of the latter, and show why all admire and none censure them; and shall then try to explain how it is that some but faintly approve, or decidedly condemn, the works of the former, while others fearlessly rate them among the very highest of the productions of genius.

To what sentiments, then, — to what faculties, — do the portraitures of Sir T. Lawrence appeal? and by what laws are their merits estimated? The answer will show that most of the sentiments they awaken are such as exist in the bosom of almost every man.

It may, perhaps, be with truth asserted, that no human creature in a sound state, mental and corporeal, ever existed, who was quite unsusceptible of that pleasure which arises from the sight of a clever imitation. The exclamation of a clown, on beholding the pictured face of any person familiarly known to him, will immediately attest the pleasure which he receives from the deception; the most experienced critic will also derive satisfaction from the *look of life* which a skilful painter can infuse into his works. The nearer imitation approaches to the appearance of reality, the greater is the pleasure excited by it. The colossal portrait, or the miniature, of one's friend, can never be taken for the living person; but, under certain favouring circumstances, a picture of the just dimensions may, for a moment, cheat the eye; and this advantage, as far as it is worth, the President possesses in representing his figures nearly of the natural size. Here, then, is one appeal extending to every beholder.

Again, there is a considerable class to whom the representations of genteel life are pleasing; and Sir T. Lawrence unquestionably gives to his subjects the look of gentlemen and of gentlewomen, in a style superior to that of any other existing painter.

Others, in addition to the pleasure derived from these two sources, feel great delight from delineations of female beauty; and nowhere can more exquisite specimens be found than in the portraitures under consideration.

A fourth class will experience an intense satisfaction from the display of a perfect command of pencil — from the impress of the character of the painter upon his canvass; and in Sir T. Lawrence's *touch* they will find elegance, and tenderness, and gentle power. This class comprehends the superior artists, and, perhaps, but a few of the critics and amateurs; but the influence of their opinions is extensive.

Another class of artists and sound critics may be sensible of high delight from the evidences of that faculty, not a very common one, which enables a painter to impart to his works the charm of *fine colouring;* and in this department of his art Sir T. Lawrence is not defective, though he is assuredly inferior to some other living painters.

Lastly, a yet smaller class, but consisting generally of persons of cultivated minds, and who exercise a considerable influence upon the opinions of others, find pleasure from beholding forcibly imprinted upon the countenance, nay, upon every attitude, — even upon the very drapery, — the character, the predominant feeling, of the individual depicted; — the

somewhat breathing as it were, from the soul, upon every thing within its influence: and in this respect also, as far as his subjects allow, is Sir T. Lawrence eminently successful. His lords are prodigiously lordly;—his senators are the very men, in their best looks, whom we see in the two Houses;—shrewd, sagacious, and reflecting,—conscious of power and privilege; and never doubting the result of the next election. Is it to be wondered at, that, with just claims upon the admiration of so many classes, this elegant artist should be so popular? There is much in his pictures that is delightful, and nothing that can displease. He makes no demand upon our imaginations with which they are unable to comply. With him we are in a pleasant valley, beside a quiet stream, and the Naiades and the Dryades around us are all the most polished ladies and gentlemen. He does not place us on the brink of some grand but tremendous precipice, and make our weak brains whirl with giddiness as we look down: if he takes us on an excursion of pleasure, it is in a soft-rolling coach-and-four, accompanied with lords and titled dames. His lakes are always in sunshine, and gently curled by a spring breeze,—and his rivers are at no season of the year flooded to torrents. But there are feelings in the human heart, which a painter may awaken, far nobler and more stirring than those produced by such objects—and upon these he never calls. He is an elegant copyist of the nature which is before him,—frequently an improver upon the individual subjects whom he represents,—but he has nothing of the divine faculty that can make the painter's, as the poet's eye,

"Glance from earth to heaven,—from heaven to earth."

The most unquestionable evidence of a superior mind,—a mind whose power resides within itself, and is not borrowed merely, or reflected from others,—is the manifestation of that faculty which has been named *Invention*. Clever men have ingeniously imitated the manner of great exemplars; but to produce that which has no prototype, and which other men will be proud to imitate, is to create: and this is the exertion of the rarest, if not the noblest power of the human intellect. It need scarcely be said that such originality as consists in mere oddness, or caprice, or affectation, cannot be admitted as *invention*,—which deserves the name only when it produces that which is at once new, beautiful, great, and surprising.

The possession of this high faculty we claim for Mr. Martin, almost without a doubt of universal concurrence. If his subjects are not all such as were never before attempted, they are unquestionably treated in a manner totally different from that of any preceding master. The late venerable President of the Royal Academy was among the first to perceive the striking originality of the young artist's genius, and, with a generous frankness, to predict the splendour of his career. It may safely be said, that nothing in Mr. Martin's works reminds us of the manner of any earlier artist. His strength is his own, as well as his weakness. He has not caught his light by reflection from any other glory; neither is he dark, in imitation of any other greatness obscured. His subjects and manner bespeak original power and native impulses. The mechanical processes by which the pencil produces its mimicry of form and texture, appear to resemble those of no other painter. His earth, his skies, his foliage, his draperies, his architecture, have attributes all their own. It cannot be necessary to say more upon a point which will probably not be disputed; we shall, therefore, proceed to make a

brief estimate of the qualities by which Mr. Martin has attained a reputation so well deserved; endeavouring, at the same time, to indicate the reasons why his pictures are still, to certain persons, uninteresting, or perhaps disagreeable.

The qualities which we have ventured to assign as the causes of Sir Thomas Lawrence's wide popularity we shall shortly recapitulate, because we design to show, that accomplishments which, to a man of mere talent, how exquisite soever, are absolutely essential to his very name as an artist, may, to a man of high genius, be almost unimportant.

From the first, and universally admitted charm of successful imitation, Mr. Martin derives little or no aid. His pictures are never deceptions; they are representations — sometimes mere indications — of things: a dot stands sometimes for a man, and a square patch will intimate to us a mighty city.

With the second charm in the works of the President, that which pleases by the representation of genteel life, Mr. Martin has nothing to do. To subjects like his, the genteel life of any one country or age are but as the hues upon a bubble which bursts while you look upon it. His men and women are not the men and women of London, or of England, or of Europe, or of the nineteenth century. They are such as from the creation have existed, and to the end of time shall exist.

The President's third, and most potent spell, affords to Mr. Martin no aid; for in the representation of beauty — the beauty, at least, of the human countenance — he has not hitherto succeeded. We are not without hope, justified, as we think, by the decisive improvement visible in the figures, generally, of his last great picture, that he may even yet add this attraction to his many others; but we speak now of that which he has done; and must hold that no part of his success has arisen from his power of portraying female beauty.

But neither to the fourth charm which we have assigned to the President, can we trace much of Mr. Martin's reputation, — that perfect command of pencil, namely, which gives the impress of the character of the painter upon his canvass. Mr. Martin's *touch* has not always the character of himself, or of his subjects; and the class of critics who alone can estimate this excellence properly, are not uniformly satisfied with it. His own mind, estimated by his works, should be bold, enthusiastic, and imaginative; but his *handling* does not always express this character. On the contrary, there is sometimes a tameness and littleness in his touch, quite inconsistent with the daring magnificence of his conceptions; an air of careful *neatness*, — as though his work were executed with a small brush, and a cautious hand. That no hand is, in truth, more bold and self-relying, we know from undoubted authority; but we are speaking of that which *appears* upon his works, and from which alone the general spectator can draw his inferences.

It must be admitted, that this almost feeble neatness may be the consequence of the frequent minuteness of his objects, which require to be painted with care, but which, from their number, and their comparative unimportance in the grandeur of the scene, cannot be finished with that last exquisite polish which, in many pictures that have no other claim whatever, excites an almost universal admiration. We have seen specimens of high finishing upon trifling objects from the pencil of Mr. Martin, and cannot doubt that, if he were to stoop his wing, and work upon the ground at *Still Life* with those who never soar above it, he might successfully compete with many an illustrious Dutchman. In such parts

of his pictures as permit the free scope of hand, Mr. Martin manifests a touch of perfect dominion over his canvass. Witness his mountains piled to the sky,—his foliage occasionally,—his inimitable clouds. But whatever may be his real merit or demerit in respect to his *handling*, it must, we think, be conceded, that in analysing the delight which we feel on beholding his paintings, we are not sensible that much, if any, of our pleasure is owing to that impress of the feelings of the painter upon his canvass, which we have noted as one of the causes of the general popularity of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

The fifth of those causes, which, however, we considered as less conducing to the President's success,—the charm, namely, of fine colouring,—we must perhaps consider to be also as little effective to Mr. Martin. He is, in truth, most unequal in this regard; for no colouring can well be worse than almost all his flesh-colouring,—the most difficult of all, and in some works, but not in his, the most important;—while the colouring of other parts of his paintings is truly admirable and unexcelled. We must not stop to point out instances; but shall venture to hold, that of those who admire his works, there are but a few who attribute much of their pleasure to his superior colouring.

With regard to the last quality, that, namely, of forcibly imprinting upon the human countenance,—upon every limb and attitude, nay, upon the very drapery itself,—the moving passion of the individual depicted, we must again, in the case of Mr. Martin, pronounce a chequered opinion. It has been the practice of some to hold his figures as matter for a charitable indulgence;—as so much given into the bargain with the gorgeous architecture;—as things avowedly placed there, merely to show where, as being essential to the making-out of the scene, the painter would intimate to us that men and women ought to be. But this opinion we consider to be erroneous; and we believe that the public generally, since the exhibition of the *Fall of Nineveh*, are convinced, that, in this regard, justice had not been done to the painter. We are ourselves disposed to rank him as at once among the feeblest, and the most powerful, masters of *expression*. In attempting to mark in the countenance the workings at the heart, he rarely, if ever, succeeds. His genius is essentially Epic, and not Dramatic: he can work with Homer, or with Milton, in presenting a great event, with all its magnificent concurrents—the confusion and rage of battle—physical sublimity, darkness and tempest; but he can do nothing with Shakspeare, in embodying the passion of Love, or the fine philosophy and solemn musings of Hamlet. We scarcely recollect to have heard any face from his pencil pointed out as admirable for the force and propriety of its expression, with the exception of that of Sardanapalus in the *Fall of Nineveh;* and with this we, for our own parts, never could feel satisfied.

As far, then, as he is to be viewed in this comparison with the President of the Academy, we must say, that in the faculty of depicting the varied expression of the human face, which, though assuredly in a walk far humbler and less difficult, so much contributes to the success of that gentleman, Mr. Martin has hitherto not been successful: and we shall thus find that, of the six accomplishments which we have ventured to assign as mainly contributing to that elegant painter's popularity, there is not one which we dare, in a *high degree*, to attribute to Mr. Martin. Yet he is confessedly a great painter. Glaringly deficient in any one of these qualities, Sir Thomas might have still been a successful painter of faces, but he would never have been sent for to the congress of kings;—

proud lords and dames would never have deemed themselves as much honoured as honouring in placing themselves beside his easel;—and he would probably never have taken his seat in the chair of the Academy. But, not very eminent in any of these qualities, and by others totally unassisted, Mr. Martin has elevated himself to the very highest station among painters. By what powers he has so raised himself, let us now enquire.

That which chiefly distinguishes Mr. Martin from other artists, is his power of depicting the Vast,—the Magnificent,—the Terrible,—the Brilliant,—the Obscure,—the Supernatural,—and, sometimes, the Beautiful. These are great and noble elements, and are often used by him with a masterly hand. As contrasted with those excited by the exquisite works of the President, to what different sentiments do they not address themselves! In awaking to them, we find ourselves suddenly in a new state of existence. No painter has ever, like Martin, represented the immensity of space—none like him made architecture so sublime, merely through its vastness: no painter, like him, has spread forth the boundless valley, or piled mountain upon mountain to the sky—like him has none made light pour down in dazzling floods from heaven; and none has like him painted the "darkness visible" of the infernal deeps.

With our feelings warmed, and our imaginations expanded, by such subjects, we are comparatively indifferent to the mechanical means by which they are effected. If his flesh-colouring is not so rich as that of Etty,—if the drawing of his figures is not so correct as that of Lawrence,—if his touch is not so tender as that of Claude, or so free as that of Salvator,—we can excuse it, because he excites in us emotions of a nature far nobler than those with which we contemplate the utmost perfection of mechanical skill.

It is not that fine colouring, and correct drawing, and the other accomplishments of a painter, are unimportant in even the most ideal and sublime of his works; but that, as estimated with their value in humbler subjects, they are *comparatively* so. What would Wilkie be with Martin's indifferent power of individual expression? or Etty, with no more than Martin's skill in flesh-colouring? or Lawrence, with as much imperfection in the drawing of the human figure? But if, to his higher powers of imagination, Martin could bring the full aid of these accomplishments, assuredly he would, to an incalculable degree, increase the merit of his pictures as works of art, and their effect upon every spectator, and, as a necessary result, his own already high reputation. That their colouring and pencilling contribute little towards the stirring effect of his pictures, is sufficiently proved by the undiminished, if not indeed *increased*, power of his designs, when reduced to the mere black and white of mezzotinto prints. The emanations of mind seem to come upon us with a severer grandeur from being more divested of mechanical adjuncts. The spirit of the conception appears to have cast off a portion of the clay by which it must be rendered visible to a material eye.

Mr. Martin's admitted peculiarity of pencilling has been to some persons so offensive, that they have laughed at the ignorance of his admirers. Yet those very objectors have been loud in their praises of his engravings. But the chief matter,—all that stirs great emotions within us,—is nearly the same in the picture which they revile, and in the print which they admire; and they thus tacitly acknowledge that they have attended more to some mere imperfection of the *setting*, than to the precious jewel which it bound in.

But if we feel compelled to admit Mr. Martin's mediocrity in much of that which is almost entirely mechanical in his art, there is one power that, in a free sense, may be also called mechanical, which, by the confession, we believe, of all, he possesses in a degree superior to any painter, living or dead — the great and unprecedented skill which he has shown in his management of the laws of perspective. That these laws are to be learned without difficulty by any common understanding, is not unfrequently the remark of men who have themselves shown their ignorance of them. These persons desire to insinuate, that effects produced by the application of simple mathematical laws, must have in them something of a mechanical nature which is unworthy the attention, or the use, of a man of genius; — that such effects are, in truth, a sort of *trickery* in art; and, far from being worthy of admiration for their difficulty or their rarity, are to be accomplished easily by any man who thinks the attempt worth his while, and not derogatory to the dignity of his genius. It may be sufficient, in answer to this, to say, that the laws of perspective do not furnish Mr. Martin with his magnificent conceptions; they do not create his mountains, and his far-stretching plains, — his grand array of battle, — his "cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces:" these must first exist in the mind of the painter; and the laws of perspective are merely the means by which he realises them to the eyes of others.

There is in the works of this artist a singular mingling of the great with the minute, — of vastness in the whole, and infinite multiplicity in the parts. This has been objected to; and it has been said that he has no unity, — that he paints a hundred pictures in one. But minuteness of detail is, then, only inconsistent with grandeur, when the details are not in accordance with the pervading spirit of the whole; when they manifest in the artist a *littleness* of conception, — a poor ambition after trivial attainment; — when they tend to distract attention from what ought to be the absorbing interest, — when they seem to be thrust in without a reason, and without propriety; — when they appear to have been introduced, not from any natural and obvious suggestion of the subject, but from some caprice, or wrong-headed notion of the artist; — when they imply a taste not capable of selecting exclusively the beautiful, or grand, and a judgment unable to estimate the essential and the congruous.

If Mr. Martin's multiplicities of detail can be truly charged with any of these faults, then assuredly he must, to the extent of such fault, submit to condemnation. But we cannot find that he is, in this respect, obnoxious to any of the objections above mentioned. We speak, of course, of his greater works only; and wish, indeed, to limit ourselves to his *Nineveh*, and the three paintings from which he has produced his large mezzotinto plates. He depicts a *great event*, and gives *the whole*, and all its *congruous parts*. He does not, like Bassan, in the picture to be seen at Hampton Court, make the exquisite painting of a brass pan form a prominent object in a representation of the Deluge. He introduced sometimes his "vessels of silver and of gold," but it is only when they form a necessary part of his story; and they are not obtruded upon the eye, as if they would challenge the admiration of the painter of still life. In *Belshazzar's Feast* he covers the table with glittering utensils, though at the same moment the dreadful words, from the hand that has disappeared, are flashing unearthly light through the magnificent hall, and a mysterious terror has seized upon every beholder; but these utensils are the "golden and silver vessels" which had been taken from the temple of Jerusalem — and for the desecration of which that punish-

ment was, in part, thus awfully denounced upon the proud and impious king. When, in the *Fall of Nineveh*, he mixes with his representation of so direful an event a dazzling display of jewellery and gorgeous furniture, it is because these things are essential to the great incident which occupies the foreground of the picture. Sardanapalus is about to terminate a life of voluptuousness by a daring and deliberate act of self-destruction; but he will not leave his concubines and his riches to the enemy. He has caused to be heaped up "all his gold, and silver, and royal apparel"—and they stand upon the vast pile, awaiting the torch that is already kindled. To have omitted these, would have been to tell that portion of his story more imperfectly. The artist has to represent, not some individual action, but a scene in which numberless actions are working to one end. He has to depict the fall of a great city, and the contest betwixt armies. Surely there is not the less of unity, because a thousand consentaneous actions are involved in the great one, which, without such, could itself never have had existence.

Though, as our readers have already seen, we have estimated Mr. Martin's power of physiognomical expression at a somewhat humble rate, there is, we must now add, another species of *expression*, in which he stands almost unrivalled. Its influence has been felt by all who have received pleasure from his works; but by very few has the secret of its strength been perceived. This expression it is, by which every part of a picture is made, as it were, in one grand harmony to sound the chord of that emotion which is to it as the soul by which it lives:—it is the convergence of every ray towards the one burning point;—the bowing down of every subject-part before the throne of the one ruling sentiment. And in this fine concord resides the real unity of the picture, and not in its relative fewness or multitude of parts. A disciplined army beneath one chief is itself but *one*, though consisting of thousands; and a painting may possess its integrity unbroken, though out of its fractional parts might be formed a thousand pictures. We must illustrate our meaning by referring to one of Mr. Martin's works; and shall select that which, like a sudden sunshine, burst upon the unexpecting public—his *Feast of Belshazzar*.

The story here told is of a supernatural visitation—of an immediate act of the hand of God working visibly to the human eye. A wicked and arrogant king sits with his thousand lords, his wives, and his concubines, at the feast, and impiously profanes the vessels which had been consecrated to the worship of the One God: but the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone, they praise and worship. The measure of his guilt is full; and the punishment must follow. But, in the face of all has the crime been perpetrated, and before the eyes of all must his doom be announced. In the height of their sacrilegious banquet, a hand—an armless hand—writes upon the wall the irrevocable words; and, having written them, disappears. Then is the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts trouble him, so that the joints of his loins are unloosed, and his knees smite one against another. The astrologers and the soothsayers strive in vain to read the unknown characters; but the prophet of God appears, and interprets them to the king. This interpretation is almost immediately verified; for, "in that night is Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." This is the subject of the picture,—a theme grand, awful, and difficult. It is not a subject for a *fine colourist* merely, or an *expert draughtsman*, but for a *poet* who can embody his conceptions in *form* and *colour*.

What, then, is the great sentiment impressed by such a subject? and

what is it, consequently, that the painter has to accomplish? To answer this, we again ask, — what must have been the prevailing sentiment of the spectators in the actual scene? Various emotions might, at moments, mingle in various bosoms: the king might mourn his downfall, — the queen might lament her son, — the thousand lords might tremble for their power and their riches: — but these, and every other possible feeling, must be in subjection to the overwhelming awe arising from a belief in the immediate presence of an offended and threatening God. This, then, is the great sentiment; and this it is which the painter must attempt to infuse into his picture: every thing in it must have relation to this; all must be solemn, sublime, mysterious, and awful. He has to represent a scene in which the Deity himself, not all invisibly working, is an immediate agent: but how is this to be effected? The "fingers of a man's hand, writing upon the wall," were, to the actual spectators, sufficient to attest the supernatural presence; but, as so many preceding painters have shown, in a picture, the motionless hand is merely ridiculous. It looks too often like the fragment of a statue, or like an inflated glove, or like any thing rather than the living, but not human, hand, whose possessor, though viewless, was *felt* to be present. It was in the *actual motion* of this bodiless hand, leaving behind it the unknown characters, that the token of a supernatural agency was acknowledged. The moveless hand merely, or the written letters merely, would have been thought the trick of an impudent impostor; but the armless hand, *moving* before their eyes, was indeed a terrible and unearthly spectacle. *But the pictured hand cannot move;* and the painter has therefore apparently nothing left but an unhappy choice betwixt the dead unmoving fingers and the characters ready-written out, — an alternative which seems to promise little success, as is shown in the labours of other artists. We do not mean to say that *The Feast of Belshazzar* has not been admirably painted by others, but that, before the present work, there has not been, as far as our knowledge extends, any thing that could pretend to be even the faintest shadowing forth of the *supernatural denunciation from God against the king of Babylon.* Mr. Martin was the first to perceive, that it was not in the bodiless hand merely, or in the unknown letters, that the mystery and the terror consisted, — but in *the sense of a present supernatural power.* To awaken this sentiment was, then, his first great object; and he perceived that, though he could not give to the hand a supernatural *motion*, he might yet impart to the already written letters a character of mystery and terror, which would equally excite the sense of a supernatural presence. This he has triumphantly accomplished, by giving them vastness of size, and a splendour, as though the hand that had traced them had guided the lightning over the wall, and left its yet burning fires imprinted there. Having accomplished this, — having raised emotion of a character so awful and sublime, — it was necessary that all the accompaniments of the scene should likewise sustain a character of grandeur and awful magnificence. Letters written as with lightning would have been ill-matched with a mean and familiar-looking chamber, — with commonplace decorations, or such objects as are every day beheld around us. To the spectators of the *actual event*, the effect might have been of equal force in a temple or in a closet; but not so to the spectators of *the picture.* By the former, nothing would have been seen but the bodiless hand, and the letters; but, by the latter, every thing will be deliberately examined; and every thing should therefore be made to sustain the mind, as much as possible, at its highest tone. The ruling sentiment of the present subject is *a sublime and supernatural awe*, and every part of the picture should,

therefore, receive its character from that sentiment. Vastness and strength of architecture powerfully excite a sense of awe and grandeur; such an emotion, though differing in kind and in degree, is therefore in harmony with that ruling sentiment; and Mr. Martin has accordingly presented us with a hall of dimensions and gorgeous strength unparalleled. But when to the grand and the gigantic we superadd some powerful moral association, — when we give to it the hoariness of antiquity, — when we deepen its solemnity by the obscurity of night, — when, by concealing its limits, we lead the imagination to draw out the vast almost into the infinite, — then, indeed, do we awake to a sense of awe and sublimity, beneath which the mind seems overpowered. How nobly has not the artist provided for this feeling by that tremendous tower, which, buried in clouds, and darkly visible under the flaring of the distant lightning, looks grimly over the roofless palace-hall, as if its impious builders had indeed made its top to reach unto the heaven! Every thing, in a word, combines to excite and sustain that emotion of sublime and supernatural awe, which is the ruling sentiment, the very soul of the subject.

We have heard it said that Mr. Martin has never copied a picture of any other master, — that he has never studied anatomy, — and that he has rarely, if ever, painted from the living figure. If these assertions be true, we do not know how he could satisfactorily clear himself from the charge of a negligence that must have been most injurious to him. The neglect of these two essential studies may amply account for two of his chief imperfections, — the generally incorrect drawing of his figures, and the indifferent colouring of his flesh. Assuming that he is himself conscious of these two failings, it must appear surprising that the obvious cause should not have occurred to him, and that the remedy, as obvious, should not have been resorted to. He colours his flesh ill, — but, to colour well is not an instinct, — it is an art; and an art is never, in its perfection, the produce of a single mind, but the result of the accumulated labour and experience of many. He that avails himself of all that has been done by others before him, may hope, by the superaddition of something, to excel them all; but he that trusts to his own unaided genius for that which can be learned, in its most perfect state, only from the labours of others, places himself, to a certain degree, in the disadvantageous situation of the man who had to struggle against the difficulties of its first feeble beginning. Whatever the native powers of such a man may have been, he probably effected little, and was soon forgotten. The painter that would colour well, must not hope, by the force of his own genius, to leap at once to that height which has been attained only through the united and long-continued labour of all that have gone before him; but must diligently study the best patterns which they have left, and endeavour to add perfection to that which seems the most perfect. Nature alone must not be his study, for he does not make *his* man from the dust, and breathe into his nostrils the breath of life; his flesh is of another clay, and must be wrought after a different fashion. Nature must be his model, but Titian, and Vandyke, and Velasquez, must be his instructors. We cannot believe that it is even yet too late for Mr. Martin to resort to the living model, and the glowing canvass of his great predecessors, for improvement in his figures and in his colouring. The striking superiority, in these two particulars, of his last great picture over all his preceding works, justifies the belief that he might still — in the practical part, at least, of his art, — far surpass that which he has done the best; and encourages the hope that he will, with unrelaxing diligence, pursue every means which may conduce to farther excellence.

PART SECOND.

POETRY AND THE DRAMA.

THE NATURE AND OBJECT OF POETRY.*

We are not aware that any successful attempt has been made to explain the nature of Poetry, or to show by what general characteristics it is distinguished from prose. Most of the discussions upon this pleasant art have been introduced with reference to the merits of particular pieces, and avoid the general question altogether. Some are occupied in analyzing the structure of the story; some in canvassing the probability of the incidents, the truth of the characters, the purity of the diction, or the correction of the metaphors; leaving the grand distinction between poetry and prose, as well as the component qualities of poetry itself, to the speculation of the reader. With the few who have taken a wider range, it has been usual to consider poetry merely as one of the fine arts, and to compare it accordingly with painting and music and sculpture: And as this forms, no doubt, a branch of the discussion on which we are about to enter, we may as well begin by saying a few words on this comparative view of it.

In so far, then, as Poetry may be considered as one of the fine arts, we apprehend that it is undoubtedly the *first* of them; because it combines nearly all the excellences of the other arts, with much that is peculiar to itself. It has the vivid beauty of painting, the prominence and simplicity of sculpture, and the touching cadences of music, while it outlasts them all. For Time, which presses on most things with so wasteful a force, seems to have no effect on the masterpieces of Poetry, but to render them holy. The "Venus" of Apelles, and the "grapes" of Zeuxis have vanished, and the music of Timotheus is gone; but the bowers of Circe still remain unfaded, and the "chained Prometheus" has outlived the "Cupid" of Praxiteles and the "brazen bull" of Perillus.

Poetry may not perhaps attain its end so perfectly as painting or sculpture; but that is because its end is so high, and its range so much extended. It deals with more varied and more remote objects, — with abstract ideas and questions of intellect which are beyond the reach of the other arts. It may be considered as a moral science, operating both upon the passions and the reason, although it never, strictly speaking, addresses itself directly to the latter. It operates through the medium of words, which, however inferior, in certain cases, to colours or sounds, are far more generally available, and, in fact, perform what neither sounds nor colours can accomplish. It may indeed be truly said, that the highest object of painting and sculpture has been to translate into

* Specimens of the Earlier English Poets — S. W. Simpson. The Commonplace Book of British Poetry. — Vol. xlii. p. 31. April, 1825.

another language, and for the benefit of a different sense, what the imagination of the poet has already created. Almost all the treasures of Italy and Greece are *copies*, made by the chisel or the pencil, from elevated fable (which is poetry), or from Greek or Hebrew verse. That they have their own peculiar hues and symmetry, does not disturb this opinion; for the original *idea* existed entire before, and that sprang from the imagination of the poet. Painting, in fact, as well as sculpture, is essentially a *mimetic* art: but poetry is not essentially, though it may be casually, imitative; and when it is so, it is imitative in a different manner, and in a less degree. As a mimetic art, it is, in one sense, inferior to the others; but it is not limited, like them, to a moment of time; and it can display the characters, the manners, and, above all, the sentiments of mankind, in a way to which the others have no pretensions. The very nature of the medium through which it acts prevents it from being so strictly mimetic as sculpture and painting: for *language* cannot, in any way, copy directly from nature, unless it be in imitation of *sound;* and music, although said to imitate motion, in reality does little more than imitate the sounds which accompany motion. In comparison with Music, however, Poetry has a vast and acknowledged superiority, both as to the distinctness and variety of the impressions it conveys. The pleasure of music, in so far as it is not merely organic, and in some sort sensual, seems to consist merely in the suggestion of general moods or tones of feeling, without any definite image, or intelligible result; and, though it may sometimes prompt or excite the mind to poetical conceptions, it can scarcely of itself attain any intellectual or passionate character, except by being "married to immortal verse," and thus reduced to an accompaniment or exponent of that nobler and more creative art.

In regard to the difficult question, as to *what* poetry is, it may be as well to begin by negatives; and to separate what may occasionally or accidentally aid its effect, from what is truly essential to its existence.

Poetry, then, is *not* necessarily eloquence, fiction, morality, description, philosophy, wit — nor even passion; although passion approaches nearest to it, when it spreads that haze before our eyes, which changes and magnifies objects from their actual and prosaic size. Passion, in truth, often stimulates the imagination, and the imagination begets poetry; but it operates also upon other parts of the mind, and the result is simply pathos, indignation, — eloquence, or tears. *Philosophy*, again, is founded in reason, and is built up of facts and experiments, collected and massed regularly together. It is constituted entirely of realities, and is itself a thing no more to be questioned than an object that stands close before us, visible and tangible: it is always to be *proved*. But poetry proceeds upon a principle utterly different; and, in the strict sense, *never* exists but in the brain of the writer, until it be cast forth in the shape of verse. Neither is *Fiction* always poetical; for it deals often in the most simple conceptions, and pervades burlesque and farce, where human nature is degraded, as well as poetry, where it is elevated. Again, a *Maxim* is never, *per se*, poetical, nor a *satire*, nor an *epigram;* although all may be found amongst the writings of our poets. *Descriptions* of nature are commonly assumed to be poetry, but we think erroneously; for a *mere* transcript of nature is, of necessity, prosaic. It is true, that the *materials* out of which poetry is compounded, lie, perhaps, principally in nature; but not poetry itself. *Eloquence* or rhetoric is nothing more than an exaggeration of prose. Words may be strong, glowing, stimulating, and yet, even though rythmically assorted, possess no imagination or fancy.

In oratory, indeed, it may be that poetical figures are mixed up with, and lend a grace to speech; but the staple of the orator's pleadings must be prose, which he uses (or abuses) to convince the understandings of his hearers — or, at all events, to persuade them, by direct and substantial motives, to some actual and practical end. Demosthenes and Cicero were eloquent; but who will assert that they were poetical? They were rhetorical, vehement, ingenious: they *reasoned*, and thereby persuaded: but they would *not* have been persuasive, had they made use of poetry, which is complicated, instead of prose, which is single and obvious, for the purpose of convincing their hearers.

If none of these intellectual qualities be essential to Poetry, we need scarcely say that it is not simply *verse;* although that may be useful, and perhaps even necessary to its existence. Verse is the *limit*, or shape by which poetry is bounded: it is the adjunct of poetry, but not its living principle. Neither is poetry *music;* so that, to try it by the laws, either of metre or of tone, must necessarily be fallacious. It is well enough, as a matter of amusement, to ascertain how the lines of our great poets have been fashioned; but to deduce authoritative rules from poems that have been written without rule, is plainly to derive an argument in favour of bondage, from the most splendid proofs of the benefits of freedom. Shakspeare most assuredly wrote without any reference to rule: he trusted to his ear, and produced the finest *dramatic* verse in the world. Milton also, beyond competition the greatest writer of epic verse of whom we can boast, learned as he was both in metres and music, and with the finest apprehension for harmony, evidently composed without rule, and trusted to his ear alone for those exquisite cadences with which, from his Lycidas to his Paradise Regained, all his poems abound. It is undeniable, indeed, that the verse which is most perfectly according to rule is uniformly the most disagreeable. We are speedily tired of lines where the meaning invariably ends with the tenth syllable: and if we admit this, and allow the poet to terminate his periods in the middle, or in any other part of the line, where is his privilege to cease? Verse, in its own nature, implies nothing but regularity, and any kind or degree of regularity that is found to be agreeable must be just as legitimate as any other. It might be rash, perhaps, to depart altogether from familiar models; but to insist that certain lines, with certain accents, should *alone* be held up as models, because they produce a good effect among others of a different modulation, is preposterous. Is it to be supposed that Milton did not know what he was about when he threw in that strange line —

> "*And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old*" —

or when he speaks of

> "The secrets of the hoary deep; *a dark*
> *Illimitable ocean*" —

or Shakspeare, when he addresses Earth, "our common mother,"

> "*Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast*
> Teems and feeds all?" —

And yet we think the critics would be perplexed, were they to attempt to subdue these lines to their canons of quantity. What would the painters say, if an amateur should stand forward and insist on their piling all their figures in a precise triangle? Yet we know that the pyramidal shape is the *beau idéal* of an artist. Variety, in short, is

necessary in poetry as in other things. It is *the whole* that should be harmonious; and it is not true that this large and effective harmony is to be attained by the absolute and exact uniformity of all the corresponding parts. The poets know this: and it will be well for us to leave them to the free practice of their art, instead of perplexing them with dogmas, which we are sure that the better part of them will never consent to follow. But to come a little nearer an affirmative.

Poetry is *a creation*. It is a thing *created* by the mind, and not merely copied either from nature, or facts in any shape. Next to this general, but most correct and significant definition, if it can be so called, perhaps the best explanation is that given by Lord Bacon, where he says, that "poetry doth *raise* and erect the mind, *by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind;*" though here, as in all the rest of the discussion, we should ever bear in mind, that poetry, after all, is the *effect*, and not the *cause*. It does not properly "*alter* the shows of things," but transcribes from the imagination the new form that results from the alteration. Its *after* effect upon the reader is produced by this transcript, and he sees merely the new *poetic creation*, and receives its effects. Poetry, then, is to be understood as a thing "*different from prose*," which is its antithesis; that is to say, it is always something different from the literal prosaic fact, such as we contemplate it with the eye of sense or reason. However it may be true in itself (and it ought to be true), as a compound image or signification of consistent ideas, it must not be in all respects *literally* true. The materials of poetry, as we have said, are to be found in nature or art, but not poetry itself; for, if poetry were strewn before us like flowers, or if it irradiated the heavens like sunshine or the stars, we should have nothing to do but to copy it as exactly as we could; and it would then be a "mimetic"* art only, and *not* "a creation." Prose, according to our conception of it, is in substance the presentment of single and separate ideas, arranged for purposes of reasoning, instruction, or persuasion. It is the organ or vehicle of reason, and deals accordingly in realities, and spreads itself out in analysis and deduction — combining and disposing words, as figures are used by arithmeticians, to explain, or prove, or to produce some particular effect from established premises. It acts upon foregone conclusions, or tends by regular gradations to a manifest object; and in proportion as it fails in these, it is clouded or imperfect. *Poetry*, on the other hand, is essentially complicated. It is produced by various powers common to most persons, but more especially by those which are almost peculiar to the poet, viz. *Fancy*, and the crowning spirit — *Imagination!* This last is the first moving or creative principle of the mind, which fashions, out of materials previously existing, new conceptions and original truths, not absolutely justifiable by the ordinary rules of logic, but quite intelligible to the mind when duly elevated — intelligible through our sympathies, our sensibility, — like light or the balmy air, although not sufficiently definite or settled into form to stand the cold calculating survey of our reason. It is not so much, however, that imagination *sees* things differently from reason, as that it *uses* them differently; the one dealing with single ideas, and observing, if we may so speak, the naked

* We do not forget Aristotle's "Μιμησις:" — but etymology and general opinion are clearly against the great Stagyrite. Neither he nor Lord Bacon were, in the usual acceptation of the term, poets; and were therefore, perhaps, with all their great powers, less qualified to judge of certain processes of the mind, than inferior men who experienced them.

reality of things; the other combining and reproducing them as they never appear in nature. Nevertheless, poetry, though creative in its principle, comprehends not so much what is impossible, as what is at present unknown; and hence, perhaps, may be urged the claim of its followers to the title of "*Vates*." It is the harmony of the mind, in short, which embraces and reconciles its seeming discords. It looks not only at the husk and outward show of things, but contemplates them in their principles, and through their secret relations. It is brief and suggestive, rather than explicit and argumentative. Its words are like the breath of an oracle, which it is the business of prose to expound.

Imagination differs from fancy, inasmuch as it does by a single glance what the latter effects by deliberate comparison. Generally speaking, imagination deals with the passions and the higher moods of the mind. It is the fiercer and more potent spirit; and the images are flung out of its burning grasp, as it were, molten*, and massed together. It is a complex power, including those faculties which are called by metaphysicians—Conception, Abstraction, and Judgment. It is the genius of personification. It concentrates the many into the one, colouring and investing its own complex creation with the attributes of all. It multiplies and divides and remodels, always *changing* in one respect or other the literal fact, and always *enriching* it, when properly exerted. It merges ordinary nature and literal truth in the atmosphere which it exhales, till they come forth like the illuminations of sunset, which were nothing but clouds before. It acts upon all things drawn within its range; sometimes in the creation of character (as in *Satan* and *Ariel*, &c.), and sometimes in figures of speech and common expression. It is different in different people; in Shakspeare, bright and rapid as the lightning, *fusing* things by its power; in Milton, awful as collected thunder. It peoples the elements with fantastic forms, and fills the earth with unearthly heroism, intellect, and beauty. It is the parent of all those passionate creations which Shakspeare has bequeathed to us. It is the origin of that terrible generation of Milton,—Sin, and the shadowy Death, Rumour, and Discord with its thousand tongues, Night and Chaos, "ancestors of Nature," down to all those who lie

"Under the boiling ocean, *wrapt in chains*"—

of all phantasies born beneath the moon, and all the miracles of dreams. It is an intense and burning power, and comes

"*Wing'd* with red *lightning and* impetuous *rage*"—

(which line is itself a magnificent instance of imagination)—and is indeed a concentration of the intellect, gathering together its wandering faculties, and bursting forth in a flood of thought, till the apprehension is staggered which pursues it. The exertion of this faculty is apparent in every page of our two great poets; from

"The *shout* that *tore* hell's concave,"

to the "*care*" that "*sate* on the faded cheek" of Satan; from the "*wounds* of Thammuz" which "*allured*"

* "The brain," as Hobbes says, "or spirit therein, having been stirred by divers objects, *composeth an imagination of divers conceptions*, that appeared single to the sense. As, for example, the sense showeth at one time the figure of *a mountain*, and at another time the colour of *gold;* but the imagination afterwards hath them both at once in a "golden mountain."—*Essay on Human Nature*, ch. 3.

"The Syrian damsels *to lament* his fate,"

to those

"*Thoughts* that *wander* through eternity;"

from the "*curses*" of Lear upon his daughters, which

"*Stamp wrinkles* in her brow of youth,"

to Hamlet—

"*Benetted* round with *villanies*,"

and thousands of others which meet us at every opening of the leaves.

Fancy, on the other hand, is generally (but not always) glittering and cold—the preparatory machinery of poetry, without its passion; sporting with sights which catch the eye only, and sounds which play but on the ear. It proceeds upon a principle of assimilation, and irradiates an idea with similes; but it leaves the original thought untouched, and merely surrounds it with things which ornament, without either hiding or changing it. Fancy seems like an *after-thought*, springing out of the original idea: but the Imagination is born with it, coequal, inextricable, like the colour and the shape of a flower. Imagination, indeed, is as it were a condensation of the Fancy; acting directly on the idea, and investing it with qualities to which it is the business of Fancy to compare it. The loftiest instances of the last-mentioned faculty are perhaps in Milton, as, where he describes "the populous North," when her "barbarous sons"

"Came—*like a deluge* on the South!"

or where he speaks of the archangel Satan, saying that

"He stood—*like a tower!*"

Here, although "the populous North" itself is imaginative, and the conception of Satan a grand fiction of the imagination, the likenesses ascribed to each are the work of Fancy. In both these cases, however, she soars almost beyond her region. Again, in the words of Lear,

"Thou think'st 'tis much that this *contentious storm*
Invades us to the skin;"

and the well-known line—

"How sweet *the moonlight sleeps* upon this bank!"

and in that fine expression of Timon, "the *dying deck*"—where he invests the mere planks of a vessel with all the deeds that have been acted upon them, and colours them with blood and death—it is the *Imagination* which is evidently at work: so is it also in the case of the "*wilderness of monkeys*," where the inhabitants of the forest are made to stand for the forest itself.

The grand distinction, in short, which exists between poetry and prose is, that the former (independently of its principle of *elevation*) presents *two* or more ideas, linked or massed together, where the latter would offer only one. And hence arises the comparative unpopularity of the former with ordinary readers, who prefer humble rhyme to poetry, and a single idea to a complicated one, inasmuch as it saves them from the fatigue of thinking. And the distinction between Imagination and Fancy is simply, that the former altogether changes and remodels the original idea, impregnating it with something extraneous; the latter leaves it undisturbed, but associates it with things to which, in some view or other, it bears a resemblance.

In the foregoing examples of the operation of Imagination and

Fancy, the effects produced by each are — *poetry*. If Shakspeare had written —

> " Thou think'st it much that this *most violent* storm
> *Should wet* us to the skin,"

or —

> " How sweet the moonlight *shines* upon this bank" —

(although the last line might still have been musical), he would certainly have written *prose*, and nothing more. When Cleopatra says,

> " Have I the *aspic in my lips?*"

the double idea may not be so obvious, but it is still there: the reptile is confounded with its power (its poison), and made one; the cause and the effect are amalgamated.

Truth was not made for the benefit of infidels, who are its foes; but for willing apprehensions; and, accordingly, it is to these only that Poetry addresses itself. It repels and recoils from the ignorant and the sceptical: the first, from some malformation or want of cultivation of the mind, are unable to comprehend it; and the latter try it by laws to which it is not lawfully subject. When Brutus, in Shakspeare's " Tarquin and Lucrece,"

> " Began to *clothe his wit* in state and pride,"

we feel that this is not the language of prose; and that, however pregnant the phrase may be to a willing ear, it is not the sober and severe language of a reasoner. Neither of these two last quotations are, as may be easily seen, absolute *facts*, because, as we have said, poetry is never *literally* true. Nevertheless, it must not be considered as void of truth because it is not a literal transcript of nature, or of ordinary life: were it so, we should never sympathise with it. On the contrary, it contains, as it were, the essence of truth, and is a concentration of its scattered powers. It is a world different from our own, but not in opposition to it; moved on the whole by the same passions, and subject to the same influences, as ourselves. It may be that some scene or character is lifted entirely out of ordinary nature, as in the case of Satan, or the Red Cross Knight, Caliban, Ariel, and Oberon; yet these, and all other grand fictions, are true to *themselves*, and maintain their proportions like a simple metaphor; and we shall generally find, that the natural passions prevail even in the most fantastic creations of the Muse.

Every one who has considered the subject will own that it is often impossible to justify the finest things in poetry to an unwilling mind, or upon the ordinary principles of logic. And the question which arises on this discovery is — *which* is imperfect? — the law, or the art? For our parts, we think the former. When Milton tells us of " *darkness visible!* " we feel that he has uttered a fine paradox; we feel its truth, but cannot prove it. And when, in that appalling passage where the poet stands face to face with Night and Chaos, in their dark pavilion, " spread wide on the wasteful deep," and says that

> ——— " By them *stood*
> Orcus and Ades, *and the dreaded* NAME
> *Of Demogorgon!*"

how is it possible to reconcile such expressions to a mere prosaic understanding? — " Darkness" is, strictly speaking, " absence of light;" how then shall we say that it is visible when we see only by the aid of light? And with respect to the " Name" of Demogorgon, which " stands" by

Orcus and Ades, how can such a phrase be justified by the rules of reason? Nevertheless, it is as magnificent as words can make it. It is clothed in a dark and spectral grandeur, and presses upon our apprehensions like a mighty dream. Who is there that would give up such things for the sake of logic? May not the truth be, that logic, which is the weapon of prose, touches not the airy nature of poetry? or that the laws of reason are at present too imperfect to make the divinity of poetry clear to human capacity? It is well known that our senses are perpetually deceived, and that our reasoning faculties are incompetent to the understanding of many of the phenomena of the external world. Is it not, then, fair to suppose, that the finer intuitive movements of the mind and feeling may also escape? Assuredly, the sense which apprehends these grand expressions of Milton, is finer and loftier than the hard scepticism which denies them. Why then should the one give place to the other? In the same predicament with Milton is Shakspeare perpetually. When, by a strong effort of the imagination, he fuses too ideas into one, the cause, perhaps, and the consequence; or when he arrays a bare and solitary thought with all the pomp and circumstance which surround it — talking of the "*dying* deck" — we admire the prodigious boldness of the figure, and rest contented, without trying it by the rules of common language. It is, like thousands of others, beyond the jurisdiction of prose.

The mind which cannot comprehend poetry may be said to be wanting in a sense. Yet such are precisely the minds which criticise poetry the most narrowly. They try it by the prosaic laws, which they do comprehend, and set up for judges on the ground of their own defects! — Nevertheless, we do not wish to claim for poetry the exemptions of the *jus divinum*. Poetry is subject to reason — not indeed as prose is subject, throughout all its images, but *independently* of its imagery and elevation of sentiment; and it must not therefore be tried by a standard to which it does not profess to assimilate itself, nor by rules with which it is in its nature at variance. It can never be made good, and demonstrated like a syllogism. But, as it springs from, and is addressed to, the imagination, so can it be subject to strict laws only when the laws of that faculty shall be discovered.

We have already quoted several instances of poetical phraseology; but it is not alone in such expressions that poetry consists. The *idea* of a character, a person, a place, may be poetically conceived, as well as the expression in which it is dressed. Thus the idea of Milton's "Satan" is purely imaginative and poetical, as are the conceptions of Titania and Oberon, Ariel and Caliban, and the cloudy Witches of Macbeth. Macbeth himself is poetical, on another ground, *i. e.* from the circumstances into which he is impelled, as are, in like manner, Hamlet, Juliet, and Lear. A chimera, a leviathan, a gorgon, the snake which was fabled to encircle the world, the sylphs and the giants, Echo, Polyphemus, shadowy Demogorgon, Death and the curling Sin, the ocean-born Venus, and Pallas, who sprang out armed from the brain of Jove — are all poetical. Milton's vision of hell — Spenser's palaces and haunted woods — the Inferno of Dante — the faithful Shepherdess of Fletcher, and her home in Arcady — the Arabian fictions, with their silent cities and blazing sights, in air and under ground; their gems and dreams of riches; their fairies, genii, and enchanters; their men turned into marble; and, in short, all that world of wonder which illuminated ancient Bagdad, or grew up like a garden of enchantment on the banks of the Tigris — are all fictions of the imagination, and, as such, have claims to be distinguished as the offspring of the great

family of poetry. Again, the meeting of Gabriel and Satan, at the end of the fourth book of Paradise Lost, where the squadron of angels turn "fiery red"—and the stature of Satan, angry and dilated, "reached the sky"—the speed of Puck, who "puts a girdle round about the earth" in forty minutes—the ghost who revisits the "glimpses of the moon"—Una, taming the forest lion by her beauty—the iron man—the fretted and wealthy cave of Mammon—must all have been poetical, in whatever diction the ideas had been clothed.

The staple of Poetry then is *imagery:* so that even where it deals with abstract ideas and indefinite objects, it generally moulds them into shape. It is thus that certain virtues and qualities of the mind are brought visibly before us. Unfortunately, HOPE and CHARITY, FAITH, and LOVE, and PITY, &c. have now become commonplaces; but they were, notwithstanding, amongst the first and simpler creations of the art. In another way, mere inanimate matter is raised to life, or its essence extracted for some poetical purpose. Thus the air, in its epithet "airy," is applied to motion, and the "sunny" locks of beauty are extracted from the day. Thus the moon becomes a vestal, and the night is clothed in a starry train; the sea is a monster or a god; the winds and the streams are populous with spirits; and the sun is a giant rejoicing in his strength. Again, as the essence of poetry, generally speaking, (for it is sometimes otherwise, in the case of sounds and perfumes,) consists in its imagery, so its excellence varies in proportion as those images are appropriate and perfect. The imagination, which acts like an intuition, is seldom wrong; but when a thought is spread out into similes, by the aid of fancy, it not unfrequently becomes unnatural. Again, the figures or images may be repeated till they run into cold conceits, or they may not amalgamate and harmonise with the original idea. Petrarch, Doune, Cowley, and Crashaw, all men of genius, offended in these points. They trusted often to their ingenuity instead of their feeling, and so erred. Excellence is not necessarily the property of imagination or of fancy, which may be lofty or tame, clear or obscure, in proportion to the mind of the poet. Nor must we forget that poetry, which depends at least as much upon the vivid sensibility of the writer as upon his intellect, depends also somewhat upon his discretion. When Crashaw, in his "*Music's Duel*," speaking of the nightingale, who is contending for the palm of music with a man, says,

——"Her supple breast thrills out
Sharp airs, *and staggers in a warbling doubt*
Of dallying sweetness,"—

we feel instantly that the idea is overloaded, and extended beyond our sympathy. There are four distinct epithets made use of to express a single idea. This argues poverty in the writer, at least as much as a superabundance of imagery. So Cowley maintains a metaphor throughout a whole poem; as in the one entitled "*Coldness*," where he begins by comparing his love to water, and goes on to show how it is acted upon by kindness and rigour, the one causing it to flow, and the other to freeze. This is the masquerade of poetry. On the contrary, when Bolinbroke goes,

"As *confident as* is *the falcon's flight*,"

to do battle with Mowbray, and Eneas the Trojan, bearing a challenge to the idle Greeks, cries out,

——"Trumpet, blow loud!
Send thy *brass voice* through all these *lazy tents*"—

we admit at once the fine keeping of the images. Again, when this same Eneas diffidently enquires for the leader Agamemnon (whose "topless deputation," on the other hand, the parasite of Achilles mimics), saying,

> "I ask that I might *waken reverence,*
> And bid the cheek be ready with *a blush,*
> *Modest as morning when she coldly eyes*
> *The youthful Phœbus,*"

we feel that the picture is perfect.

We have characterised certain things *as poetry;* but we must not be understood to say, that all which may fairly be called poetry is thus, word by word, impregnated with Imagination and Fancy. We have extracted the essence; whereas the cup of poetry, even at the strongest, is not all essence: but, as wine is not composed entirely of the grape, so is the rich Castalian mixed with the clear waters of the earth, and thereby rendered palatable to all. It requires, like durable gold, some portion of alloy in order to preserve itself through the common currency. It is a Doric temple, where all is not exclusively divine, but partakes, in common with others, somewhat of the structure of ordinary buildings. So, in poetry, all is not of the "Dorian mood," or of the "order" of poetry, but is intermingled and made stable by a due addition of other materials. It is by these means that poetry acquires its popularity. The most imaginative writings are assuredly but little relished by the common or uninitiated reader: they require too much of the labour of thought — too much quickness of apprehension and power of combination, on the part of readers (as well as authors), to be likely to please generally. A maxim or a sentiment conveyed in prose, especially if it be such as flatters our self-love, will produce twice the effect on the crowd that pure poety can ever hope to accomplish. Dr. Johnson's favourite lines,—

> "I dare do all that may become a man:
> Who dares do more, is none"—

act like electricity; yet they are neither poetry, nor, strictly speaking, truth. They involve a *non sequitur*, as Partridge would have termed it; and were probably flung out by Shakspeare from his boundless hoards as a plausible bait for the crowd. Even in him and in Milton, our two most undisputed poets, there are many striking, and even beautiful passages interspersed, which can claim but little distinction from prose, in regard to mere phraseology, except that they are compressed within the limits of heroic verse. Thus, those two bulky lines in "Troilus and Cressida"—

> "*The large Achilles, on his press'd bed lolling,*
> *From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause*"—

although they present a grand, bold picture, and seem actually burthened with the words which they bear, are not, with respect to phrase or expression, essentially poetical. Neither have those sad and beautiful words of Antony,—

> "Eros!—I come, my queen. Eros! stay for me.
> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
> Dido and her Eneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours"—

a decided claim to be considered as poetry, in point of expression only. Even the exquisite pathos of Lear, at the end of that mighty play, when his frenzy quits him, under the influence of Cordelia's care ("Pray do not mock me," &c.), cannot be called essentially poetical, though they are

to us more touching than the grandest poetry. They are simple and unimaginative, and purely pathetic, as the situation of Lear then requires that they should be. His days of indignation and sorrow are over: his spirit is calm and sunk; and the winged words which became madness and the tempest, would have been out of place when his mind and body were relaxing gradually into the repose of death. In these cases, however, and in similar ones, it must be observed, that the picture presented, or the idea originated, may be poetical, although the mere words may have but little claim to that title. Thus, in that airy and exquisite account of "Mulciber," in the Paradise Lost, where Music and Poetry run clasped together down a stream of divine verse, there is little of the strictly poetical phrase, except where it is told that he

"Dropt from the zenith *like a falling star;*"

but the whole picture is nevertheless beautiful, and conceived in the spirit of poetry. These are a few cases, and there are thousands of others. Generally speaking, however,—in the works of true poets, the phrases are glowing with Imagination or bright with Fancy, as well as the pictures presented; and we should have exceeding doubt as to the claims of a writer, whose characters or pictures only had some tinge of imagination, while his details remained couched in language which could not pretend to any other name than "prose."

There has of late been some discussion, amongst a few of our eminent writers, in regard to "objects which are or are not poetical." We are not about to revive the subject at any length; but we may observe, that the art of poetry originates in the *faculty* of its professors. If it existed in nature, and a writer had simply to transcribe her appearances, *any* body might become a poet as a matter of course. But the poetical faculty does *not*, as we apprehend, consist simply in describing what is splendid already, for that may be done by a prosaic mind; nor in selecting what is beautiful, for that is the employment of taste. Nevertheless, it is true that certain objects, inasmuch as they approach to that standard, to which it is the *aim* of poets to sublime the tamer and ordinary appearances of the world, and may therefore reasonably be considered as the models existing in the poet's mind, may so far be allowed to be the most "poetical," or the nearest allied to poetry. Poetry (we do not mean satire), it is to be remarked, deals with the grand, the terrible, the beautiful; but seldom or never with the mean. Its principle is elevation, and not depression or degradation. It is true that, in tragedy and narrative, characters and images of the lowest cast are sometimes admitted; but for the purposes of contrast only, or to "point a moral." Poetry is not constituted of those base elements, nor does the true poet luxuriate in them: they are subject to his dominion, but do not rise to his favour.

The nearer then that an object approximates to what is evidently the standard or the result of poetic inspiration, the nearer it may be said to approach to poetry itself. For the principle which animates the creator must exist in the thing created. The grandeur which he aspires to fashion, the beauty which he delights to mould, partake surely in some measure of, or bear some resemblance to, the grandeur and beauty which exist independent of his creation. Under this view, — the stream, the valley, the time-wasted ruin and the mossy cell — the breathing Venus, and the marble Gods of Greece and Rome — the riotous waves and the golden sky — the stars, the storm, and the mad winds — ocean, and the mountain which kisses heaven — Love and Beauty, Despair, Ambition

and Revenge — all objects or passions which lift our thoughts from the dust, and stir men into madness — almost every thing which has in it a strong principle of impulse, or elevation, has a claim to be considered poetical. It is the meaner things of life, its tameness and mediocrity, its selfishness and envy, and repining, which, though subdued occasionally to the use of poetry, are too base for an alliance with it; and which creep on from age to age, recorded indeed and made notorious, but branded with immortality for the sake of example only, and trampled under the feet of the Muse.

The object of poetry is not to diminish and make mean, but to magnify and aggrandise — "to accommodate the shows of things to the *desires* of the mind;" which, in its healthy state, all tend upwards. It does not seek to dwarf the great statures of nature, nor to reduce the spirit to the contemplation of humble objects: its standards are above mortality, and not below it. Surely then, if this be almost invariably the tendency of the poetic mind, those objects (be they in art or nature) which approach nearest to the ideas of the poet, must be fairly considered as being in themselves nearest to poetry. Whether art or nature is to be preferred to the highest station, is another question. For our own parts, we are inclined to prefer art to science, and nature to art. A brilliant light may be thrown upon a pack of cards, and the fancy may play and flutter over a game of ombre; but this proves nothing but the skill of the poet in this particular instance. Is it to be supposed, that if he had beheld the dissolution of a world, or seen Uriel gliding on a sunbeam, arrayed in his celestial armour and majestic beauty, he could have done no more? We think otherwise. Occasionally it may have appeared, that the poorest things have been exalted and made level with the loftiest, by a republican spirit of poetry; but we shall find, on close investigation, that most of these instances (if not all) are unavailable; that the things spoken of have reference to matters of higher moment; and that it is from these that they derive their importance. It is not, for instance, the "*taper*" only which throws a poetic lustre, but it is the flame which shines at "*midnight*," and burns in solitude and silence. It is not "*night's candle*" only, but it is when the candle is connected with the time — when *jocund Day*

"*Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops;*"

that it rises into poetry.

With respect to the end or intention of poetry — its different kinds — and its origin, — a very few words must suffice at present, our business being more particularly with the art, as understood and practised by the loftiest *English* writers. It has often been asserted, that the object of poetry is — to please; and assuredly this is *one*, though by no means the sole object of the art. It is said that, although in moral poetry improvement be blended with amusement, the latter is nevertheless the object. We submit that this position is not clear. In the case of didactic poetry ("The Essay on Man" — the "Art of Preserving Health," &c.) the *aim* is instruction, and verse is but the medium or the attraction which the poet employs. In satire, the object is not to please a friend, but to sting an enemy; and we presume that the prophecies of the Bible must be admitted to have had an object beyond pleasure. The war-songs of the ancients were to stimulate the soldier; and their laments were to soothe regret. Poetry contains in it a strong stimulant; and although a feeling of pleasure may blend with other emotions, it does not follow that the attempts of poetry are not directed to objects different from those of

merely "pleasing." As to the different kinds of poetry, there are so many upon each of which a treatise might be written, that we prefer referring the reader to essays on the subject, rather than delay him at present by a brief exposition of that which he would probably wish to see treated in more particular detail. For our own parts, we are not inclined to lay extraordinary stress upon the mere structure and mechanism of poetry. It is not very material, we think, that a poem should be built up according to rules, many of which originated in the caprice of former poets; nor whether it be called an epic or a romance, an epistle or a dirge, an epitaph, an ode, an elegy, a sonnet, or otherwise. If it be full of the *matériel* of poetry, and contain something of fitness also, it will go far to satisfy our critical consciences.

ON THE UTILITY OF POETRY.*

The advocates of Utility have long been in the habit of decrying Poetry, and have lately renewed their attacks on it with increased bitterness and vehemence. They have discovered, it seems, not only that it is of no earthly use, but that it actually does a great deal of mischief — induces us to disregard truth and admire falsehood, to indulge in exaggerated sentiment, and to weaken the authority of reason over passion and imagination. As to its positive evils, we believe we need not concern ourselves much: but there are many people who really seem to think that it must be acknowledged that poetry is of no use; and consequently that, if at all to be tolerated in an industrious community, it ought to meet with no encouragement, and be treated with no respect. The short answer to this is, to ask what is here meant by "being of use," and whether any thing that gives *pleasure* may not properly be called useful? Unless we are to stop at the mere necessaries of life, it would be difficult to dispute this; and, after all, if life itself was not a *pleasure*, the utility even of its necessaries might very well be questioned. Even the rigorous definition of the proper object of all virtuous exertion, according to the utilitarians themselves, viz. the greatest happiness of the greatest number — obviously involves the consideration of pleasure and enjoyment; and makes this enjoyment, as indeed it truly is, the measure and test of utility. In what sense then can it be said that poetry is of no use to mankind — if it is admitted that it affords the most intense delight to great multitudes among them, and has always been recognised as a copious and certain source of enjoyment, in all conditions of life, and all stages of society? The only replication must be, that the pleasures it brings are accompanied by greater pains, or that the pursuit of them leads to the neglect of higher duties, or, what is the same thing, to the exclusion of still greater pleasures. We do not think, however, that this can be even plausibly pretended; and we do not observe that the champions of utility have ever seriously taken that ground. The truth is, that their irreverence to the Muses is much more a matter of habit and feeling

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* The Songs of Scotland. By Allan Cunningham.—Vol. xlvii. p. 184. January, 1828.

with them than of reasoning; and, though attired occasionally in logical forms, proceeds in the main from mere prejudice and ignorance.

It frequently happens that circumstances direct the mind to the contemplation of truth in opposite directions. The faculties of men are practically developed in the exercise of their various pursuits, and the whole force of their intellect is generally exhausted in limited and particular investigations; and this necessarily detracts from their power of judging of arts and sciences alien to their own. It is thus that the great value placed on mathematical studies becomes not unfrequently a subject of doubts to a theologian or a moralist; while the excellence of poetry or art is questioned, in its turn, by the utilitarian or the legislator.

In all probability, it is with the mind as with the body — some limbs or sinews are occasionally kept in severe exercise, to the utter neglect of the rest; and the consequence is, that the one set gains strength and flourishes, while the other has a tendency to weaken or decay. Thus the Reason of some men is cultivated to the utter extinction of the Imagination; though it is but fair to suppose that the latter faculty was bestowed upon us for *some use or purpose*, equally with the former — the only question is, how to employ it profitably.

The motives which tempt a mere reasoner, a mathematician, or political economist, to abase the character of poetry, are, it must be allowed, as obvious as those which induce a writer of verse to exalt it. There is no sympathy with its pleasures in the one, while there is an over-wrought and interested admiration in the other. The former cannot be said, indeed, to be absolutely without the faculty of imagination, but it may be averred that he possesses it in a latent or undeveloped state; and we suspect that he cannot *thoroughly* understand the operations of a power which he himself has never individually felt. He sees only the ultimate consequence, without witnessing or experiencing the progress of the idea in the mind. He perceives what the imagination *has* produced, but is unable to judge of the impulse, or to speculate, otherwise than imperfectly, upon what it may produce hereafter.

Leaving the question however, as to what this faculty may cause to be produced, or what a great poet *may* do, who shall task his powers to the uttermost, or wait patiently and sincerely for the illuminations of his imagination, it is enough to affirm that it *exists*. It is a POWER (and no mean one) not to be despised or neglected, but to be cherished and *used*, like any other power, for purposes beneficial to mankind. The most inveterate utilitarian would hesitate, we apprehend, to yield up any one nerve or fibre of the human frame, however useless it might, at first sight, appear to him to be. He would calculate wisely on the chance of its becoming at one time or other serviceable, and would be not without some misgivings as to the fallibility of his own particular opinions. Why then should the Imagination (a subject at least as mysterious and important) be entitled to less consideration than a nerve or a sinew? "It is a folly," as Montaigne thinks, "to measure truth or error by our own capacity;" and we think so too.

As, therefore, the Imagination is an existing power, — as it has given birth to numerous works, some of which have had a prodigious effect upon the habits of thinking, and even upon the moral conduct of men, — it is not the part of a philosopher (however little he may be under its influence) to despise it. It is to be used or misused, but not neglected nor contemned; for it can no more be extinguished than the mind of man. Ethical and political philosophy and mathematics are now held to be the

master sciences; and unquestionably they are most important ones. But there are other arts and sciences nearly as important, some of which are connected or collateral with those now mentioned, and some which may be said to be altogether independent of them. Amongst the first or collateral arts must undoubtedly be reckoned POETRY. It is, in the words of the great philosopher, "subservient to the Imagination, as Logique is to the Understanding*;" and its *office* "(if a man well weigh the matter) *is no other than to apply and commend the dictates of Reason to the Imagination, for the better moving of the Appetite and the Will.*" Being an ally of reason and logic, therefore, as Lord Bacon says, it should not be treated as a foe, nor despised as a thing insignificant.

If man were merely an intellectual being, subject only to be influenced by pure reason, there might be some ground, perhaps, for maintaining that poetry was, strictly speaking, useless. A code of laws might then probably be framed excluding this delightful art from the commonwealth of letters, and substituting we know not what intellectual pleasure in lieu of it. But this most certainly neither is, nor can ever be, our condition. We are not Houyhnhnms, but men; and we must seek the gratification, as well as guard against the abuse, of all the faculties with which we are actually gifted. In the formation of a system, a wise man will consider what *has* been, as well as what *may* be; for wisdom is little else than a synonyme for experience, and the future must always be built up from the past. It is desirable, therefore, to consider not only the value of the qualities with which we propose to endow any creature, but also the capacity of the creature to receive them. What should we think if some philosopher from the Ottomaques, or some follower of Brahma, should come hither, and insist — the one, that it would be more nutritious, the other, that it would be more virtuous, if we were for the future to feed upon pipe-clay mixed with oxyd of iron? † We should scarcely respect even the zeal of one of our Christian missionaries, were he to attempt to extend the benefit of the Scriptures to any of the tribe of *Simiæ*, the Chimpansé, or the Pongo. It is true, that there is not so great a distinction amongst men, as between men and mere animals; yet the difference between the white race and the other varieties of the human species is greater than can be accounted for by climate or accident. Nay, amongst ourselves, distinctions are very obvious. We are not all mathematicians, or philosophers, or moralists, or poets. The human mind has certain defects, (so called,) and is liable to extraordinary changes. Its transitions, from vice to virtue, from equanimity to despair, have astonished all but the most profound philosophers. It is, in truth, made up of good and evil impulses; of faculties which employ themselves in poetry and prose,— in other words, of *Imagination* and *Reason*, &c.—it is full of affections, of passions, of powers, infirmities, and errors of all sorts, which are to be combated with and *directed*, but can never be altogether extirpated. It has its springs and movements which obey the warnings of reason, and others which are subject to the "skiey influences" of poetry; and these act sometimes independently, sometimes in unison with each other. The object of Logic (which is the voice of reason) is to act for good purposes upon the intellect. The end of Poetry is "*to fill the Imagination with observations and resemblances, which* MAY SECOND REASON, *and not oppress and betray it:* for these

* Lord Bacon's *Instauratio Magna*, lib. vi. c. 3.
† Humboldt, *Tab. Phys. des Régions Equatoriales.*

abuses of arts come in but *ex obliquo*, for prevention, not for practice." * All this being the case, it seems that all speculations for putting down poetry must necessarily be vain and useless. They are formed, perhaps, for man as he ought to be; but certainly not for man as he is. They are, in short, like that Dream of Plato, which has been a dream and nothing more for two thousand years. That celebrated Greek denied admittance to a poet in his ideal republic; and his republic has remained ideal.

In addition to all this, it may be further argued, that there are certain gradations in society, which require different employments. There are the rude, the civilised, and the luxurious or refined. The human mind in one state cannot digest what it is eager for in another. In rude society, the mechanic and agriculturist are the most important characters. Afterwards, the legislator and the moralist insist upon precedence; and, finally, the poet is elevated into renown. If, after all, it be asked, what is the most important science? the answer is, probably,—*all*. It is not sufficient to say, in opposition to the claims of the poet, that the state of refinement is the most unnatural, or that poetry is a luxury and a delusion only, and consequently little better than a vice: for luxury is bad only in so far as it injures the moral constitution of a people. Poetry, perhaps, may be considered as a luxury—we shall not dispute about terms; but so are all the products of all the arts and sciences. Our very houses are a great luxury, and all that they contain — and most of our food and our dress also. There is not a single comfort that we enjoy which is not liable to this imputation. We have all something beyond what absolute necessity requires.

> ——— "Our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest things superfluous."

But shall we therefore abandon every luxury, every comfort? There is, we think, at least as much of vice and folly in spurning at the beneficence of Nature, as in receiving the gifts which she bestows on us readily, and using them with discretion.

Poetry, then, is not to be reprehended as a pernicious delusion, till it is proved that its general purposes are bad; and certainly this is not generally true, but the reverse, inasmuch as it exhibits for the most part a high standard of perfection, and puts forward illustrious examples of worth and courage. And yet these, although they soar perhaps a little beyond the level of ordinary minds, do not rise above *some* instances of excellence which the history of the world has afforded. We read of no one, in tragedy or epic, who has surpassed Phocion or Aristides,—Cymon, or Brutus, or Timoleon,—Socrates or Solomon,—Alfred, Shakspeare, Bacon, Sir Philip Sydney, or Bayard, in their several ways, for virtue or intellect, or noble disinterested heroism. It may be asserted, indeed, after all, that poetry is no more a fiction than are certain maxims of law and state, which have been engrafted on the severest and most practical of the sciences, in order the better to enforce or illustrate some of their most important doctrines. Nor is it more a delusion—even when it holds up a picture of ideal excellence—than any prose Atlantis or Utopia, which has been devised, not only to increase our admiration of virtue, but for practical and direct imitation. Nay, might not the same charge be brought against any scheme of moral and political good, which might be

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* Lord Bacon's *De Augmentis Scientiarum*.

drawn out for the benefit of mankind at the present moment—a state of things desirable, it may be, for a moralist or legislator, but as utterly unadapted, *in its whole extent*, as poetry itself, to the passions and affections of human nature? Doubtless such a scheme would contain in it many elements of wisdom; much of what is good, and much of what is prudent; and so also does poetry. But there is probably *another* aspect to the science, as well as to the art; in which some blemishes may be detected, and some maxims, which, when reduced to practice, might put to confusion the supporters of the theory.

It is not often that the mind addicts itself, for any length of time, to a pursuit that is wholly useless. The cultivation bestowed so generally, and so unsparingly, upon the reasoning faculties forbids such a supposition; and the experience of the world contradicts it. In poetry, more particularly, such a charge seems altogether presumptuous, considering the character and fortunes of many of those who have been professors of that art. Is it reasonable to think that Chaucer, and Shakspeare, and Milton, (the last a legislator and politician,) should have cast away their lives, and expended such treasures of intellect, upon an art that was properly the subject of contempt?* Could they, who saw the faults and follies of all the world beside, discern none in themselves? Did they feel that their pursuits were nugatory—their talents misdirected—their lives useless? Or, was it, indeed, that these great men were really *admirers*, as well as professors of their art,—not following it from necessity, or the love of gain, but from motives as pure, and an ambition as lofty, as ever stimulated the legislator or the moralist? This, in fact, *was* the case. They were disciples of the Muses in their youth, and followed the profession which they had adopted from manhood to the grave. There is not one of them who has not left on record his reverence for poetry. There is not one who has not been the free champion of his art, as well as the disinterested friend of man; bequeathing to posterity his labours and his fame, and reaping, in return, its gratitude—for learned precepts, for brilliant models; for *wisdom* fashioned in a thousand shapes, and applicable to all uses; for *moral axioms* and witty sayings; for characters full of *exemplary virtue;* for fiction full of truth; in a word, for images at once instructive and beautiful, which leave their outlines indelibly upon the memory, when the bare precept or abstract truth would have vanished and been forgotten.

Precept is assuredly not the only way by which knowledge may be communicated; nor is it always the best. It may be communicated by example—often more effectually, and sometimes where precept will not operate. The folly of ambition and jealousy may surely be seen, not without advantage, in the dramas of Shakspeare. The double lesson which is taught by *Lear*, the beautiful fidelity of *Imogen*, the hate and prodigality of *Timon*, are *truths* from which we derive something. In

* Who can forget the brilliant testimony of Swift?

"Not empire, to the rising sun,
By valour, conduct, fortune won;
Not greatest wisdom in debates,
Or framing laws for ruling states;
Such heavenly influence require
As how to strike the Muse's lyre."

And by whom is this uttered?—by the sternest, severest, most sarcastic of all modern writers—by the bitter satirist, the cunning politician, the worldly, ambitious, scoffing Dean of St. Patrick's.

these, and similar stories, we see the *effect*, a material part of instruction, where practical wisdom is to be inculcated, and one which mere precept unfortunately wants. Besides, after all, precept is only secondary knowledge, being itself derived from facts. It is only the inference which the observation of man has deduced from certain established premises: and why may it not be equally, or even more beneficial, to go at once to the fountain-head of knowledge, — to the fact, or to a true representation of the fact, — instead of contenting one's self with the wisdom which has been distilled and extracted, perhaps discoloured, by other minds? Again, there is a large class of persons, who will read a poem or go to a play, but who will not sit down to the perusal of a dry essay, or examine the merits of a logical argument, respecting some metaphysical or moral question. The mere desire of acquiring knowledge influences but a very limited portion of mankind; the desire to arrive at moral truth operates, we fear, upon even a less number; and where these impulses are wanting, something, we suspect, must be held out to allure the understanding to its own improvement, — something, in which there shall be sufficient of information to render the acquisition gratifying to the vanity, and enough of pleasure to satisfy the senses.

In history, the object is to teach through experience and example. But is not this also the case with fiction and poetry? If it be replied here that the two latter are illusory, we may retort the question of — is history much less so? What history, in fact, is there which is not replete with partiality, and in other respects fundamentally erroneous? This must necessarily be the case, and to a much greater extent than we can possibly be aware of. In the first place, it is a work composed either by a person who is himself living amongst and tainted by the prejudices of the age, or else by one who writes at a distant date, when he is without ocular proof or oral testimony, and is left to guess between the jarring or imperfect accounts of partial contemporaries. In order to there being a perfect historian, there must be an eye-witness, and an impartial man; and no person, with such qualities united, has hitherto appeared. It is curious, and a little instructive too, in this view of the subject, to see how so able a man as Hume could rail, in his private letters, at the partiality and deficiencies of historians, and afterwards write such an account as he has written of the degenerate house of Stuart. The truth is, that there is often as much of fiction in history as in poetry, without the sincerity of the fiction being apparent. It has been said, to be sure, that the characters of the former are "real," and therefore "*instructive*," while those of the latter afford merely amusement. But are the characters of history sufficiently perfect to tempt us to imitation? We fear not. Neither is the moral effect (except in very rare instances) so obvious as in the latter case, where the cause and the consequence, the "bane and the antidote," are both before us, displaying, for our edification, the natural progress of individual history, — the temptation, the crime, and the punishment. Fiction, it is true, is (as its name imports), in a certain sense, less "real" than history; that is to say, it goes more beyond common every-day facts; and it is not without intention that it does so. It is like a lofty mark, which we cannot strike without discipline and exercise. Were it easy to touch, and only of the ordinary height, its object would altogether be lost.

Poetry, so far as it enervates the mind, is assuredly injurious. But it generally *stimulates* the mind; and whether it stimulates it to good or ill must depend upon the individual qualities of the poets themselves. It

may be argued, indeed, that there is no need of *any* impulse: but we suspect that the moral, like the physical constitution, requires stimulants at least as often as sedatives. That these stimulants almost invariably impel the mind to error (for something like this is asserted), is a maxim founded upon partial instances and replete with untruth. We deny that it is so. In fact, so far as we can collect instances of poetry having been brought in to participate with politics, there have always been two bands of partisans, as well as two sides, to the question at issue. If there has been a phalanx of rhymers on the one side, there has always been a battalion of poets on the other. Some of the greatest names in our literature shine equally as patriots and poets, and most of them have belonged to writers who have done what they could to discountenance hypocrisy and ward off oppression, whether on the part of the king or of the aristocracy. Let us recollect the characters of only three great men amongst our poets, Milton, Marvel, and Pope, and hasten to rescind so unqualified and unjust a judgment.

If poetry be bad and useless in its principle, it must necessarily have been so always; for it is not subject to change, being founded on certain established principles which are beyond the influence of fashion, and caprice. In that event, the great works of Shakspeare must be set down as useless and bad, as well as all the parables of the Bible; all fiction, all dialogue (except such as has actually occurred), all illustration, all the satires of Juvenal and Pope, of Cowper and others, against vice and folly; many of the didactic writings of the poets; and all fables, even the most moral. So it appears to those who are merely logicians, and on whom an image makes less impression than an axiom. They deny the utility of poetry, by asserting that whatever of good it has produced, might have been produced equally well or better in prose.* But this never *has* been done hitherto; and it is by no means clear that the mind which has thrown out certain ideas in poetry, could have done as much in prose; for the impulse, which occasioned it so to shape those ideas, would have been wanting. There are certain minds which naturally exercise themselves in poetry, and delight in it, and can only get at their best ideas by means of imagery and association, as others do by calm meditation or methodical inference. So also there seem to be corresponding intellects, which can only perceive the beauty of truth and virtue, or feel the wretchedness of guilt, when their imaginations had been roused by the power of poetry, or wrought upon by the stimulating example of fiction.

Considered even as an unobjectionable *amusement*, poetry keeps up our intercourse with hope and pleasure; it brightens the spirits, and improves and enlarges the heart. Though pent up in smoky rooms, and tasked to irksome employments, we yet live out of doors with the poets, among leaves and flowers — and balmy winds and azure skies. We wander through trackless woods, beneath oaks and branching elms, "star proof." We lie down by sparkling fountains, and listen to the voice of murmuring rivers, and forget our cares and ills, the pains of sickness, and poverty, and neglect, in the unchequered beauty of a delightful dream.

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* The converse of this proposition is frequently true. "Even our Saviour could as well have given the moral common-places of uncharitableness and humbleness, as the divine narration of Lazarus and Dives; or of disobedience and mercy, as the heavenly discourse of the lost child and gracious father; but that his thorough-searching wisdom knew that the estate of Dives burning in hell, and of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, *would more constantly*, as it were, *inhabit both the memory and the judgment*." — *Sir P. Sydney's Defence of Poesy.*

Neither is the relapse hurtful; for our visions are never (in the injurious sense) delusions. We do not believe in the actual existence of the things which pass thus soothingly across the surface of our imagination. We feel that they are resemblances, not falsehoods; and these are just sufficient to abstract us awhile from the realities, to which we return refreshed by an excursion into the wilderness of thought; not fatigued and disappointed, as we might have been, had we reckoned upon the permanency of the delight. They form, in fact, a wholesome cessation from our reasoning habits, like sleep, or a quiet landscape; but enjoyed when sleep will not come to us, and when there is no beauty of landscape actually near, to relieve the fatigue of our brain, or induce pleasurable and gentle emotions.

But poetry has been always something *more* than a mere amusement. It was through the channels of poetry that much of our knowledge originally came; and, as Sir Philip Sydney has said, "they go very near to ungratefulness who seek to deface that which, in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the *first* lightgiver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk, by little and little, enabled them to feed on tougher knowledge." It was the habit of association, which forms a principal part of the complex faculty of the imagination, that may be said to have led to various discoveries in science, and to have furnished Bacon with his luminous illustrations in philosophy. These advantages must not be forgotten: neither must the good effect of poetry upon the memory be passed over; the more especially as Mr. Bentham himself has afforded us some evidence on that point. We cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of republishing the poetry of so formidable a coadjutor; who has practically testified to the "utility" of verse, by actually composing three couplets; for the purpose, as he states, of "*lodging more effectually in the memory certain points on which the whole fabric of morals and legislation may seem to rest.*"*

There is one more point which we would fain remark upon, before we quit this part of the subject. It is said that, in the pursuit of the severer Sciences, certain "*ideas*" may at least be gained, to recompense the student for his labours; while it is insinuated, that no such compensation is yielded to the follower of Poetry. We must deny this altogether. It is as much an "idea," and an idea as valuable, to gain a knowledge of the movements of the human mind, — to see how it is affected by certain causes, and how it adapts itself to various contingencies, — to contemplate it when under extraordinary depression, or when lifted to a state of

* In Mr. Bentham's valuable book on *Morals and Legislation*, under chapter 4., which bears the title of "Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, how to be measured," he says, that to a person considered *by himself*, the value of pleasure or pain, considered *by itself*, must be measured according to — 1st, Its intensity; 2d, Its duration; 3d, Its certainty or uncertainty; 4th, Its propinquity or remoteness. And in a subsequent edition he adds the following note: — "Not long after the publication of the first edition the following memoriter verses were framed, *in the view of lodging more effectually in the memory these points on which the whole abric of morals and legislation may seem to rest*: —

Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure,
Such marks in *pleasures* and in *pains* endure.
Such pleasures seek, if *private* be thy end:
If it be *public*, wide let them *extend*.
Such *pains* avoid, whichever be thy view:
If pains *must* come, let them *extend* to few."

Edit. 1823. p. 49.

perilous excitement, — as to calculate the expense of provisions, the progress of population, the advantages of a division of labour, or the possible benefit (or otherwise) of certain political institutions. The object of poetry, as well as of prose, is to spread abroad the knowledge of our age, to transmit the accumulated wisdom of foregone ages to the world around us, and to the times to come. They are not two combatants in one arena, with weapons necessarily opposed to each other, in order to secure self-preservation, or some definite reward, which cannot be shared between them. They were both born and brought to light to dispel ignorance, and contend with tyranny and abuse, — to stand up, hand in hand, true champions and assertors of "*the Right*," for the glory of truth and knowledge, and the undoubted benefit of all the human race.

Notwithstanding these things, and notwithstanding all that has been felt and expressed on behalf of this eminent art, we are now called upon to despise it! The world has lasted six thousand years: it has had, amongst its millions and millions of generations, some few who have soared above the rest, and become marks for the admiration of their fellows, — whose object has been undeniably good, and whose prodigious intellect is beyond question greater than that of any writer of our existing time. These men have hitherto been held to be the benefactors of mankind. They have led them into the temple of philosophy, and there given them wholesome instruction. They have directed them to the exercise of every virtue; and such as have obeyed their high lessoning have themselves become good and distinguished. They have held before these their followers the mirror of truth (of "truth severe, in fairy fiction dressed") — have placed before them illustrious examples. They have incited them to gallant deeds — have given them delight in peaceful times, and have soothed them in times of pain and sorrow. And now we are told that all this is nothing, or worse than nothing, — and by whom? By those who maintain that knowledge and moral training are the only true blessings of mankind!

There is assuredly much of what is vicious, and more of what is ridiculous, in the world; and all that is decidedly bad should of course be amended. But whether it be well to make a wreck of *all* that has so been long held valuable and graceful, in order to ensure a certain portion of doubtful good, is at least worthy of consideration. The question is — whether Poetry and Art, whether all that touches our sympathies and operates upon our affections, should be rooted up and exterminated, like some long-established evil, or wide-spread disease? For our own parts, we think *not*. We think that they should be permitted to remain; or rather, that they *will* and *must* remain, and flourish, in despite of all prophecies and opinions to the contrary. Can it, in truth, be ever otherwise, so long as hope and ambition, our love of the beautiful, and our sense of the sublime, remain integral portions of our nature?

We owe something, surely, to our Imagination which has yielded us such frequent delight, as well as to our reason; and we owe yet more to the grand and lofty spirits who have trod the earth before us, and have died, leaving behind them the imperishable records of their glory. Those immortal writings, dictated by the Imagination to poets in their happiest hours, bear upon them the impress of an amazing intellect. They bring forward, for our instruction, all the varieties of man, setting forth, in the colours of truth, his virtues and vices, his strength, his weakness, his obduracy, his pity, his inconsistencies, and follies of a hundred hues, which are nowhere else so completely marshalled and portrayed, — and

to show which, and the consequences of which, equally well, the whole region of literature may be traversed, and all the stores of history and philosophy ransacked and compared in vain. And is all this of so little value, that to have done it should entitle the doer to the contempt of his fellows? Is it *indeed* a fact, that Shakspeare and Homer, that Chaucer, Dante, Milton, and the rest, have lived for no purpose but to be an idle sound? Was all their wisdom, all their wit, indeed empty, contemptible and useless? Are the great moral pictures of Macbeth and Othello, of Satan, and Timon, and Lear, and all that illustrious array of characters, *nothing* — but only shadowy and unprofitable illusions? Is there *nothing* real in their texture — nothing of what is good or useful in their histories? Is the philosophic vein of Hamlet worn out or become base? And has his intellectual stature shrunk and fallen below that of every puny logician? Or — is it not, after all, that the opposing ideas of the utilitarians on these points are themselves groundless and illusory, — as inimical to true reason as the most extravagant and distorted metaphors of the tawdry rhetorican, and as difficult to be reduced to practice as the wildest dreams of the poet?

ON THE LAWS WHICH INFLUENCE THE PROGRESS AND DECLINE OF POETRY.*

The laws on which depend the progress and decline of poetry, painting, and sculpture, operate with little less certainty than those which regulate the periodical returns of heat and cold, of fertility and barrenness. Those who seem to lead the public taste are, in general, merely outrunning it in the direction which it is spontaneously pursuing. Without a just apprehension of the laws to which we have alluded, the merits and defects of Dryden can be but imperfectly understood. We will, therefore, state what we conceive them to be.

The ages in which the master-pieces of imagination have been produced have by no means been those in which taste has been most correct. It seems that the creative faculty, and the critical faculty, cannot exist together in their highest perfection. The causes of this phenomenon it is not difficult to assign.

It is true, that the man who is best able to take a machine to pieces, and who most clearly comprehends the manner in which all its wheels and springs conduce to its general effect, will be the man most competent to form another machine of similar power. In all the branches of physical and moral science which admit of perfect analysis, he who can resolve will be able to combine. But the analysis which criticism can effect of poetry, is necessarily imperfect. One element must for ever elude its researches; and that is the very element by which poetry is poetry. In the description of nature, for example, a judicious reader will easily detect an incongruous image. But he will find it impossible to explain in what consists the art of a writer who, in a few words, brings some spot before him so vividly that he shall know it as if he had lived there from childhood; while another, employing the same materials, the same verdure, the same

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* The Poetical Works of John Dryden. Edited by Sir Walter Scott.— Vol. xlvii. p. 3. January, 1828.

water, and the same flowers, committing no inaccuracy, introducing nothing which can be positively pronounced superfluous, omitting nothing which can be positively pronounced necessary, shall produce no more effect than an advertisement of a capital residence and a desirable pleasure-ground. To take another example: the great features of the character of Hotspur are obvious to the most superficial reader. We at once perceive that his courage is splendid, his thirst of glory intense, his animal spirits high, his temper careless, arbitrary, and petulant; that he indulges his own humour, without caring whose feelings he may wound, or whose enmity he may provoke, by his levity. Thus far criticism will go. But something is still wanting. A man might have all those qualities, and every other quality which the most minute examiner can introduce into his catalogue of the virtues and faults of Hotspur, and yet he would not be Hotspur. Almost every thing that we have said of him applies equally to Falconbridge. Yet, in the mouth of Falconbridge, most of his speeches would seem out of place. In real life, this perpetually occurs. We are sensible of wide differences between men whom, if we were required to describe them, we should describe in almost the same terms. If we were attempting to draw elaborate characters of them, we should scarcely be able to point out any strong distinction; yet we approach them with feelings altogether dissimilar. We cannot conceive of them as using the expressions or the gestures of each other. Let us suppose, that a zoologist should attempt to give an account of some animal, a porcupine for instance, to people who had never seen it. The porcupine, he might say, is of the genus mammalia, and the order glires. There are whiskers on its face; it is two feet long; it has four toes before, five behind, two fore-teeth, and eight grinders. Its body is covered with hair and quills. And when all this has been said, would any one of the auditors have formed a just idea of a porcupine? Would any two of them have formed the same idea? There might exist innumerable races of animals, possessing all the characteristics which have been mentioned, yet altogether unlike to each other. What the description of our naturalist is to a real porcupine, the remarks of criticism are to the images of poetry. What it so imperfectly decomposes, it cannot perfectly re-construct. It is evidently as impossible to produce an Othello or a Macbeth, by reversing an analytical process so defective, as it would be for an anatomist to form a living man out of the fragments of his dissecting-room. In both cases, the vital principle eludes the finest instruments, and vanishes in the very instant in which its seat is touched. Hence those who, trusting to their critical skill, attempt to write poems, give us, not images of things, but catalogues of qualities. Their characters are allegories; not good men and bad men, but cardinal virtues and deadly sins. We seem to have fallen among the acquaintances of our old friend Christian; sometimes we meet Mistrust and Timorous; sometimes Mr. Hategood and Mr. Love-lust; and then again Prudence, Piety, and Charity.

That critical discernment is not sufficient to make men poets, is generally allowed. Why it should keep them from becoming poets, is not perhaps equally evident: but the fact is, that poetry requires not an examining, but a believing frame of mind. Those feel it most, and write it best, who forget that it is a work of art; to whom its imitations, like the realities from which they are taken, are subjects not for connoisseurship, but for tears and laughter, resentment and affection; who are too much under the influence of the illusion to admire the genius which has produced it; who are too much frightened for Ulysses in the cave of Polyphemus, to

care whether the pun about Outis be good or bad; who forget that such a person as Shakspeare ever existed, while they weep and curse with Lear. It is by giving faith to the creations of the imagination that a man becomes a poet. It is by treating those creations as deceptions, and by resolving them, as nearly as possible, into their elements, that he becomes a critic. In the moment in which the skill of the artist is perceived, the spell of the art is broken.

These considerations account for the absurdities into which the greatest writers have fallen, when they have attempted to give general rules for composition, or to pronounce judgment on the works of others. They are unaccustomed to analyse what they feel; they, therefore, perpetually refer their emotions to causes which have not in the slightest degree tended to produce them. They feel pleasure in reading a book. They never consider that this pleasure may be the effect of ideas, which some unmeaning expression, striking on the first link of a chain of associations, may have called up in their own minds — that they have themselves furnished to the author the beauties which they admire.

Cervantes is the delight of all classes of readers. Every schoolboy thumbs to pieces the most wretched translations of his romance, and knows the lantern jaws of the Knight Errant, and the broad cheeks of the Squire, as well as the faces of his own play-fellows. The most experienced and fastidious judges are amazed at the perfection of that art which extracts inextinguishable laughter from the greatest of human calamities, without once violating the reverence due to it; at that discriminating delicacy of touch, which makes a character exquisitely ridiculous, without impairing its worth, its grace, or its dignity. In Don Quixote are several dissertations on the principles of poetic and dramatic writing. No passages in the whole work exhibit stronger marks of labour and attention; and no passages in any work with which we are acquainted, are more worthless and puerile. In our time they would scarcely obtain admittance into the literary department of the Morning Post. Every reader of the Divine Comedy must be struck by the veneration which Dante expresses for writers far inferior to himself. He will not lift up his eyes from the ground in the presence of Brunetto, all whose works are not worth the worst of his own hundred cantos. He does not venture to walk in the same line with the bombastic Statius. His admiration of Virgil is absolute idolatry. If indeed it had been excited by the elegant, splendid, and harmonious diction of the Roman poet, it would not have been altogether unreasonable; but it is rather as an authority on all points of philosophy, than as a work of imagination, that he values the Æneid. The most trivial passages he regards as oracles of the highest authority, and of the most recondite meaning. He describes his conductor as the sea of all wisdom — the sun which heals every disordered sight. As he judged of Virgil, the Italians of the fourteenth century judged of him; they were proud of him; they praised him; they struck medals bearing his head; they quarrelled for the honour of possessing his remains; they maintained professors to expound his writings. But what they admired, was not that mighty imagination which called a new world into existence, and made all its sights and sounds familiar to the eye and ear of the mind. They said little of those awful and lovely creations on which later critics delight to dwell — Farinata lifting his haughty and tranquil brow from his couch of everlasting fire — the lion-like repose of Sordello — or the light which shone from the celestial smile of Beatrice. They extolled their great poet, for his smattering of ancient literature

and history; for his logic and his divinity; for his absurd physics, and his more absurd metaphysics; for every thing but that in which he pre-eminently excelled. Like the fool in the story, who ruined his dwelling by digging for gold, which, as he had dreamed, was concealed under its foundations, they laid waste one of the noblest works of human genius, by seeking in it for buried treasures of wisdom, which existed only in their own wild reveries. The finest passages were little valued till they had been debased into some monstrous allegory. Louder applause was given to the lecture on fate and free-will, or to the ridiculous astronomical theories, than to those tremendous lines which disclose the secrets of the tower of hunger; or to that half-told tale of guilty love, so passionate and so full of tears.

We do not mean to say that the contemporaries of Dante read with less emotion than their descendants of Ugolino groping among the wasted corpses of his children, or of Francesca starting at the tremulous kiss, and dropping the fatal volume. Far from it. We believe that they admired these things less than ourselves, but that they felt them more. We should perhaps say, that they felt them too much to admire them. The progress of a nation from barbarism to civilisation produces a change similar to that which takes place during the progress of an individual from infancy to mature age. What man does not remember with regret the first time that he read Robinson Crusoe? Then, indeed, he was unable to appreciate the powers of the writer; or rather, he neither knew nor cared whether the book had a writer at all. He probably thought it not half so fine as some rant of Macpherson about dark-browed Foldath, and white-bosomed Strinadona. He now values Fingal and Temora only as showing with how little evidence a story may be believed, and with how little merit a book may be popular. Of the romance of Defoe he entertains the highest opinion. He perceives the hand of a master in ten thousand touches, which formerly he passed by without notice. But though he understands the merits of the narrative better than formerly, he is far less interested by it. Xury, and Friday, and pretty Poll, the boat with the shoulder-of-mutton sail, and the canoe which could not be brought down to the water edge, the tent with its hedge and ladders, the preserve of kids, and the den where the old goat died, can never again be to him the realities which they were. The days when his favourite volume set him upon making wheelbarrows and chairs, upon digging caves and fencing huts in the garden, can never return. Such is the law of our nature. Our judgment ripens, our imagination decays. We cannot at once enjoy the flowers of the spring of life, and the fruits of its autumn, the pleasures of close investigation, and those of agreeable error. We cannot sit at once in the front of the stage and behind the scenes. We cannot be under the illusion of the spectacle, while we are watching the movements of the ropes and pulleys which dispose it.

The chapter in which Fielding describes the behaviour of Partridge at the theatre affords so complete an illustration of our proposition, that we cannot refrain from quoting some parts of it.

"Partridge gave that credit to Mr. Garrick which he had denied to Jones, and fell into so violent a trembling that his knees knocked against each other. Jones asked him what was the matter, and whether he was afraid of the warrior upon the stage? — 'O, la, sir,' said he, 'I perceive now it is what you told me. I am not afraid of any thing, for I know it is but a play; and if it was really a ghost, it could do one no harm at such a distance and in so much company; and yet, if I was frightened, I am not the only person.' 'Why, who,' cries Jones, 'dost thou take to be such a coward here besides thyself?' 'Nay, you may

call me a coward if you will; but if that little man there upon the stage is not frightened, I never saw any man frightened in my life.' . . . . He sat with his eyes fixed partly on the ghost and partly on Hamlet, and with his mouth open; the same passions which succeeded each other in Hamlet, succeeding likewise in him. . . . .

"Little more worth remembering occurred during the play, at the end of which Jones asked him which of the players he liked best. To this he answered, with some appearance of indignation at the question, 'The King, without doubt.' 'Indeed, Mr. Partridge,' says Mrs. Miller, 'you are not of the same opinion with the town; for they are all agreed that Hamlet is acted by the best player who was ever on the stage.' 'He the best player!' cries Partridge, with a contemptuous sneer; 'why I could act as well as he myself. I am sure, if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just as he did. And then, to be sure, in that scene, as you called it, between him and his mother, where you told me he acted so fine; why, any man, that is, any good man, that had such a mother, would have done exactly the same. I know you are only joking with me; but indeed, madam, though I never was at a play in London, yet I have seen acting before in the country, and the King for my money; he speaks all his words distinctly, and half as loud again as the other. Anybody may see he is an actor.'"

In this excellent passage Partridge is represented as a very bad theatrical critic. But none of those who laugh at him possess the tithe of his sensibility to theatrical excellence. He admires in the wrong place; but he trembles in the right place. It is indeed because he is so much excited by the acting of Garrick, that he ranks him below the strutting, mouthing performer, who personates the King. So, we have heard it said, that in some parts of Spain and Portugal, an actor who should represent a depraved character finely, instead of calling down the applauses of the audience, is hissed and pelted without mercy. It would be the same in England, if we, for one moment, thought that Shylock or Iago was standing before us. While the dramatic art was in its infancy at Athens, it produced similar effects on the ardent and imaginative spectators. It is said that they blamed Æschylus for frightening them into fits with his Furies. Herodotus tells us, that when Phrynichus produced his tragedy on the fall of Miletus, they fined him in a penalty of a thousand drachmas, for torturing their feelings by so pathetic an exhibition. They did not regard him as a great artist, but merely as a man who had given them pain. When they woke from the distressing illusion, they treated the author of it as they would have treated a messenger who should have brought them fatal and alarming tidings which turned out to be false. In the same manner, a child screams with terror at the sight of a person in an ugly mask. He has perhaps seen the mask put on. But his imagination is too strong for his reason, and he entreats that it may be taken off.

We should act in the same manner if the grief and horror produced in us by works of the imagination amounted to real torture. But in us these emotions are comparatively languid. They rarely affect our appetite or our sleep. They leave us sufficiently at ease to trace them to their causes, and to estimate the powers which produce them. Our attention is speedily diverted from the images which call forth our tears to the art by which those images have been selected and combined. We applaud the genius of the writer. We applaud our own sagacity and sensibility, and we are comforted.

Yet though we think that, in the progress of nations towards refinement, the reasoning powers are improved at the expense of the imagination, we acknowledge that to this rule there are many apparent exceptions. We

are not, however, quite satisfied that they are more than apparent. Men reasoned better, for example, in the time of Elizabeth than in the time of Egbert; and they also wrote better poetry. But we must distinguish between poetry as a mental act, and poetry as a species of composition. If we take it in the latter sense, its excellence depends, not solely on the vigour of the imagination, but partly also on the instruments which the imagination employs. Within certain limits, therefore, poetry may be improving, while the poetical faculty is decaying. The vividness of the picture presented to the reader, is not necessarily proportioned to the vividness of the prototype which exists in the mind of the writer. In the other arts we see this clearly. Should a man, gifted by nature with all the genius of Canova, attempt to carve a statue without instruction as to the management of his chisel, or attention to the anatomy of the human body, he would produce something compared with which the Highlander at the door of a snuff-shop would deserve admiration. If an uninitiated Raphael were to attempt a painting, it would be a mere daub; indeed, the connoisseurs say that the early works of Raphael are little better. Yet who can attribute this to want of imagination? Who can doubt that the youth of that great artist was passed amidst an ideal world of beautiful and majestic forms? Or, who will attribute the difference which appears between his first rude essays, and his magnificent Transfiguration, to a change in the constitution of his mind? In poetry, as in painting and sculpture, it is necessary that the imitator should be well acquainted with that which he undertakes to imitate, and expert in the mechanical part of his art. Genius will not furnish him with a vocabulary: it will not teach him what word most exactly corresponds to his idea, and will most fully convey it to others: it will not make him a great descriptive poet, till he has looked with attention on the face of nature; or a great dramatist, till he has felt and witnessed much of the influence of the passions. Information and experience are, therefore, necessary; not for the purpose of strengthening the imagination, which is never so strong as in people incapable of reasoning—savages, children, madmen, and dreamers; but for the purpose of enabling the artist to communicate his conceptions to others.

In a barbarous age the imagination exercises a despotic power. So strong is the perception of what is unreal, that it often overpowers all the passions of the mind, and all the sensations of the body. At first, indeed, the phantasm remains undivulged, a hidden treasure, a wordless poetry, an invisible painting, a silent music, a dream of which the pains and pleasures exist to the dreamer alone, a bitterness which the heart only knoweth, a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not. The machinery, by which ideas are to be conveyed from one person to another, is as yet rude and defective. Between mind and mind there is a great gulf. The imitative arts do not exist, or are in their lowest state. But the actions of men amply prove, that the faculty which gives birth to those arts is morbidly active. It is not yet the inspiration of poets and sculptors; but it is the amusement of the day, the terror of the night, the fertile source of wild superstitions. It turns the clouds into gigantic shapes, and the winds into doleful voices. The belief which springs from it is more absolute and undoubting than any which can be derived from evidence. It resembles the faith which we repose in our own sensations. Thus, the Arab, when covered with wounds, saw nothing but the dark eyes and the green kerchief of a beckoning Houri. The Northern warrior laughed in the pangs of death when he thought of the mead of Valhalla.

The first works of the imagination are, as we have said, poor and rude,

not from the want of genius, but from the want of materials. Phidias could have done nothing with an old tree and a fish-bone, or Homer with the language of New-Holland.

Yet the effect of these early performances, imperfect as they must necessarily be, is immense. All deficiencies are supplied by the susceptibility of those to whom they are addressed. We all know what pleasure a wooden doll, which may be bought for sixpence, will afford to a little girl. She will require no other company. She will nurse it, dress it, and talk to it all day. No grown-up man takes half so much delight in one of the incomparable babies of Chantrey. In the same manner, savages are more affected by the rude compositions of their bards than nations more advanced in civilisation by the greatest master-pieces of poetry.

In process of time, the instruments by which the imagination works are brought to perfection. Men have not more imagination than their rude ancestors. We strongly suspect that they have much less. But they produce better works of imagination. Thus, up to a certain period, the diminution of the poetical powers is far more than compensated by the improvement of all the appliances and means of which those powers stand in need. Then comes the short period of splendid and consummate excellence. And then, from causes against which it is vain to struggle, poetry begins to decline. The progress of language, which was at first favourable, becomes fatal to it, and, instead of compensating for the decay of the imagination, accelerates that decay, and renders it more obvious. When the adventurer in the Arabian tale anointed one of his eyes with the contents of the magical box, all the riches of the earth, however widely dispersed, however sacredly concealed, became visible to him. But when he tried the experiment on both eyes, he was struck with blindness. What the enchanted elixir was to the sight of the body, language is to the sight of the imagination. At first it calls up a world of glorious illusions; but when it becomes too copious, it altogether destroys the visual power.

As the developement of the mind proceeds, symbols, instead of being employed to convey images, are substituted for them. Civilised men think, as they trade, not in kind, but by means of a circulating medium. In these circumstances, the sciences improve rapidly, and criticism among the rest; but poetry, in the highest sense of the word, disappears. Then comes the dotage of the fine arts, a second childhood, as feeble as the former, and far more hopeless. This is the age of critical poetry, of poetry by courtesy, of poetry to which the memory, the judgment, and the wit, contribute far more than the imagination. We readily allow, that many works of this description are excellent: we will not contend with those who think them more valuable than the great poems of an earlier period. We only maintain that they belong to a different species of composition, and are produced by a different faculty.

It is some consolation to reflect, that this critical school of poetry improves as the science of criticism improves; and that the science of criticism, like every other science, is constantly tending towards perfection. As experiments are multiplied, principles are better understood.

In some countries, in our own, for example, there has been an interval between the downfall of the creative school and the rise of the critical, a period during which imagination has been in its decrepitude, and taste in its infancy. Such a revolutionary interregnum as this will be deformed by every species of extravagance.

The first victory of good taste is over the bombast and conceits which deform such times as these. But criticism is still in a very imperfect state. What is accidental is for a long time confounded with what is essential. General theories are drawn from detached facts. How many hours the action of a play may be allowed to occupy, — how many similes an epic poet may introduce into his first book, — whether a piece, which is acknowledged to have a beginning and an end, may not be without a middle, and other questions as puerile as these, formerly occupied the attention of men of letters in France, and even in this country. Poets, in such circumstances as these, exhibit all the narrowness and feebleness of the criticism by which their manner has been fashioned. From outrageous absurdity they are preserved indeed by their timidity. But they perpetually sacrifice nature and reason to arbitrary canons of taste. In their eagerness to avoid the *mala prohibita* of a foolish code, they are perpetually rushing on the *mala in se*. Their great predecessors, it is true, were as bad critics as themselves, or perhaps worse: but those predecessors, as we have attempted to show, were inspired by a faculty independent of criticism; and, therefore, wrote well while they judged ill.

In time men begin to take more rational and comprehensive views of literature. The analysis of poetry, which, as we have remarked, must at best be imperfect, approaches nearer and nearer to exactness. The merits of the wonderful models of former times are justly appreciated. The frigid productions of a later age are rated at no more than their proper value. Pleasing and ingenious imitations of the manner of the great masters appear. Poetry has a partial revival, a Saint Martin's summer, which, after a period of dreariness and decay, agreeably reminds us of the splendour of its June. A second harvest is gathered in, though, growing on a spent soil, it has not the heart of the former. Thus, in the present age, Monti has successfully imitated the style of Dante; and something of the Elizabethan inspiration has been caught by several eminent countrymen of our own. But never will Italy produce another Inferno, or England another Hamlet. We look on the beauties of the modern imitations with feelings similar to those with which we see flowers disposed in vases, to ornament the drawing-rooms of a capital. We doubtless regard them with pleasure, with greater pleasure, perhaps, because, in the midst of a place ungenial to them, they remind us of the distant spots on which they flourish in spontaneous exuberance. But we miss the sap, the freshness, and the bloom. Or, if we may borrow another illustration from Queen Scheherezade, we would compare the writers of this school to the jewellers who were employed to complete the unfinished window of the palace of Aladdin. Whatever skill or cost could do was done. Palace and bazaar were ransacked for precious stones. Yet the artists, with all their dexterity, with all their assiduity, and with all their vast means, were unable to produce any thing comparable to the wonders which a spirit of a higher order had wrought in a single night.

The history of every literature with which we are acquainted confirms, we think, the principles which we have laid down. In Greece, we see the imaginative school of poetry gradually fading into the critical. Æschylus and Pindar were succeeded by Sophocles, Sophocles by Euripides, Euripides by the Alexandrian versifiers. Of these last, Theocritus alone has left compositions which deserve to be read. The splendid and grotesque fairyland of the Old Comedy, rich with such gorgeous hues, peopled with such fantastic shapes, and vocal alternately with the sweetest

peals of music and the loudest bursts of elvish laughter, disappeared for ever. The master-pieces of the New Comedy are known to us by Latin translations of extraordinary merit. From these translations, and from the expressions of the ancient critics, it is clear that the original compositions were distinguished by grace and sweetness, that they sparkled with wit, and abounded with pleasing sentiment; but that the creative power was gone. Julius Cæsar called Terence a half Menander, — a sure proof that Menander was not a quarter Aristophanes.

The literature of the Romans was merely a continuation of the literature of the Greeks. The pupils started from the point at which their masters had, in the course of many generations, arrived. They thus almost wholly missed the period of original invention. The only Latin poets whose writings exhibit much vigour of imagination are Lucretius and Catullus. The Augustan age produced nothing equal to their finer passages.

In France, that licensed jester, whose jingling cap and motley coat concealed more genius than ever mustered in the saloon of Ninon or of Madame Géoffrin, wus succeeded by writers as decorous and as tiresome as gentlemen-ushers.

The poetry of Italy and of Spain has undergone the same change. But nowhere has the revolution been more complete and violent than in England. The same person who, when a boy, had clapped his thrilling hands at the first representation of the Tempest, might, without attaining to a marvellous longevity, have lived to read the earlier works of Prior and Addison. The change, we believe, must, sooner or later, have taken place. But its progress was accelerated, and its character modified, by the political occurrences of the times, and particularly by two events, the closing of the theatres under the commonwealth, and the restoration of the house of Stuart.

We have said that the critical and poetical faculties are not only distinct, but almost incompatible. The state of our literature during the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First is a strong confirmation of this remark. The greatest works of imagination that the world has ever seen were produced at that period. The national taste, in the mean time, was to the last degree detestable. Alliterations, puns, antithetical forms of expression lavishly employed where no corresponding opposition existed between the thoughts expressed, strained allegories, pedantic allusions, every thing, in short, quaint and affected, in matter and manner, made up what was then considered as fine writing. The eloquence of the bar, the pulpit, and the council-board, was deformed by conceits which would have disgraced the rhyming shepherds of an Italian academy. The king quibbled on the throne. We might, indeed, console ourselves by reflecting that his majesty was a fool. But the chancellor quibbled in concert from the woolsack: and the chancellor was Francis Bacon. It is needless to mention Sidney and the whole tribe of Euphuists. For Shakspeare himself, the greatest poet that ever lived, falls into the same fault whenever he means to be particularly fine. While he abandons himself to the impulse of his imagination, his compositions are not only the sweetest and the most sublime, but also the most faultless, that the world has ever seen. But as soon as his critical powers come into play, he sinks to the level of Cowley; or rather, he does ill, what Cowley did well. All that is bad in his works is bad elaborately, and of malice aforethought. The only thing wanting to make them perfect was, that he should never have troubled himself with thinking whether they were good or not. Like the

angels in Milton, he sinks "with compulsion and laborious flight." His natural tendency is upwards. That he may soar, it is only necessary that he should not struggle to fall. He resembled an American cacique, who, possessing in unmeasured abundance the metals which in polished societies are esteemed the most precious, was utterly unconscious of their value, and gave up treasures more valuable than the imperial crowns of other countries, to secure some gaudy and far-fetched but worthless bauble, a plated button, or a necklace of coloured glass.

We have attempted to show that, as knowledge is extended, and as the reason developes itself, the imitative arts decay. We should, therefore, expect that the corruption of poetry would commence in the educated classes of society. And this, in fact, is almost constantly the case. The few great works of imagination which appear in a critical age are, almost without exception, the works of uneducated men. Thus, at a time when persons of quality translated French romances, and when the universities celebrated royal deaths in verses about Tritons and Fauns, a preaching tinker produced the Pilgrim's Progress. And thus a ploughman startled a generation which had thought Hayley and Beattie great poets, with the adventures of Tam O'Shanter. Even in the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth, the fashionable poetry had degenerated. It retained few vestiges of the imagination of earlier times. It had not yet been subjected to the rules of good taste. Affectation had completely tainted madrigals and sonnets. The grotesque conceits and the tuneless numbers of Donne were, in the time of James, the favourite models of composition at Whitehall and at the Temple. But though the literature of the court was in its decay, the literature of the people was in its perfection. The Muses had taken sanctuary in the theatres, the haunts of a class whose taste was not better than that of the Right Honourables and singular good Lords who admired metaphysical love-verses, but whose imagination retained all its freshness and vigour; whose censure and approbation might be erroneously bestowed, but whose tears and laughter were never in the wrong. The infection which had tainted lyric and didactic poetry had but slightly and partially touched the drama. While the noble and the learned were comparing eyes to burning-glasses, and tears to terrestrial globes, coyness to an enthymeme, absence to a pair of compasses, and an unrequited passion to the fortieth remainderman in an entail, Juliet leaning from the balcony, and Miranda smiling over the chess-board, sent home many spectators, as kind and simple-hearted as the master and mistress of Fletcher's Ralpho, to cry themselves to sleep.

No species of fiction is so delightful to us as the old English drama. Even its inferior productions possesses a charm not to be found in any other kind of poetry. It is the most lucid mirror that ever was held up to nature. The creations of the great dramatists of Athens produce the effect of magnificent sculptures, conceived by a mighty imagination, polished with the utmost delicacy, embodying ideas of ineffable majesty and beauty; but cold, pale, and rigid, with no bloom on the cheek, and no speculation in the eye. In all the draperies, the figures, and the faces, in the lovers and the tyrants, the Bacchanals and the Furies, there is the same marble chillness and deadness. Most of the characters of the French stage resemble the waxen gentlemen and ladies in the window of a perfumer, rouged, curled, and bedizened; but fixed in such stiff attitudes, and staring with eyes expressive of such utter unmeaningness, that they cannot produce an illusion for a single moment. In the English plays

alone is to be found the warmth, the mellowness, and the reality of painting. We know the minds of the men and women, as we know the faces of the men and women of Vandyke.

The excellence of these works is in a great measure the result of two peculiarities, which the critics of the French school consider as defects, — from the mixture of tragedy and comedy, and from the length and extent of the action. The former is necessary to render the drama a just representation of a world, in which the laughers and the weepers are perpetually jostling each other, — in which every event has its serious and its ludicrous side. The latter enables us to form an intimate acquaintance with characters, with which we could not possibly become familiar during the few hours to which the unities restrict the poet. In this respect, the works of Shakspeare, in particular, are miracles of art. In a piece, which may be read aloud in three hours, we see a character gradually unfold all its recesses to us. We see it change with the change of circumstances. The petulant youth rises into the politic and warlike sovereign. The profuse and courteous philanthropist sours into a hater and scorner of his kind. The tyrant is altered, by the chastening of affliction, into a pensive moralist. The veteran general, distinguished by coolness, sagacity, and self-command, sinks under a conflict between love, strong as death, and jealousy, cruel as the grave. The brave and loyal subject passes, step by step, to the extremities of human depravity. We trace his progress from the first dawnings of unlawful ambition, to the cynical melancholy of his impenitent remorse. Yet, in these pieces, there are no unnatural transitions. Nothing is omitted; nothing is crowded. Great as are the changes, narrow as is the compass within which they are exhibited, they shock us as little as the gradual alterations of those familiar faces which we see every evening and every morning. The magical skill of the poet resembles that of the Dervise in the Spectator, who condensed all the events of seven years into the single moment during which the king held his head under the water.

It is deserving of remark, that at the time of which we speak, the plays, even of men not eminently distinguished by genius, — such, for example, as Jonson, were far superior to the best works of imagination in other departments. Therefore, though we conceive that, from causes which we have already investigated, our poetry must necessarily have declined, we think that, unless its fate had been accelerated by external attacks, it might have enjoyed an euthanasia, that genius might have been kept alive by the drama, till its place could, in some degree, be supplied by taste, — that there would have been scarcely any interval between the age of sublime invention, and that of agreeable imitation. The works of Shakspeare, which were not appreciated with any degree of justice before the middle of the eighteenth century, might then have been the recognised standards of excellence during the latter part of the seventeenth; and he and the great Elizabethan writers might have been almost immediately succeeded by a generation of poets similar to those who adorn our own times.

But the Puritans drove imagination from its last asylum. They prohibited theatrical representations, and stigmatised the whole race of dramatists as enemies of morality and religion. Much that is objectionable may be found in the writers whom they reprobated; but whether they took the best measures for stopping the evil, appears to us very doubtful, and must, we think, have appeared doubtful to themselves, when, after the lapse of a few years, they saw the unclean spirit whom

they had cast out return to his old haunts, with seven others fouler than himself.

By the extinction of the drama, the fashionable school of poetry, — a school without truth of sentiment or harmony of versification, — without the powers of an earlier, or the correctness of a later age, — was left to enjoy undisputed ascendancy. A vicious ingenuity, a morbid quickness to perceive resemblances and analogies between things apparently heterogeneous, constituted almost its only claim to admiration. Suckling was dead. Milton was absorbed in political and theological controversy. If Waller differed from the Cowleian sect of writers, he differed for the worse. He had as little poetry as they, and much less wit; nor is the languor of his verses less offensive than the ruggedness of theirs. In Denham alone the faint dawn of a better manner was discernible.

But, low as was the state of our poetry during the civil war and the protectorate, a still deeper fall was at hand. Hitherto our literature had been idiomatic. In mind as in situation, we had been islanders. The revolutions in our taste, like the revolutions in our government, had been settled without the interference of strangers. Had this state of things continued, the same just principles of reasoning, which, about this time, were applied with unprecedented success to every part of philosophy, would soon have conducted our ancestors to a sounder code of criticism. There were already strong signs of improvement. Our prose had at length worked itself clear from those quaint conceits which still deformed almost every metrical composition. The parliamentary debates and the diplomatic correspondence of that eventful period, had contributed much to this reform. In such bustling times, it was absolutely necessary to speak and write to the purpose. The absurdities of Puritanism had, perhaps, done more. At the time when that odious style, which deforms the writings of Hall and of Lord Bacon, was almost universal, had appeared that stupendous work, the English Bible, — a book which, if every thing else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power. The respect which the translators felt for the original, prevented them from adding any of the hideous decorations then in fashion. The groundwork of the version, indeed, was of an earlier age. The familiarity with which the Puritans, on almost every occasion, used the scriptural phrases, was no doubt very ridiculous; but it produced good effects. It was a cant; but it drove out a cant far more offensive.

The highest kind of poetry is, in a great measure, independent of those circumstances which regulate the style of composition in prose. But with that inferior species of poetry which succeeds to it, the case is widely different. In a few years, the good sense and good taste which had weeded out affectation from moral and political treatises, would, in the natural course of things, have effected a similar reform in the sonnet and the ode. The rigour of the victorious sectaries had relaxed. A dominant religion is never ascetic. The government connived at theatrical representations. The influence of Shakspeare was once more felt. But darker days were approaching. A foreign yoke was to be imposed on our literature. Charles, surrounded by the companions of his long exile, returned to govern a nation which ought never to have cast him out, or never to have received him back. Every year which he had passed among strangers, had rendered him more unfit to rule his countrymen. In France he had seen the refractory magistracy humbled, and royal prerogative, though exercised by a foreign priest in the name of a child, victorious over all opposition. This spectacle naturally gratified a prince to whose family

the opposition of parliaments had been so fatal. Politeness was his solitary good quality. The insults which he had suffered in Scotland, had taught him to prize it. The effeminacy and apathy of his disposition, fitted him to excel in it. The elegance and vivacity of the French manners, fascinated him. With the political maxims and the social habits of his favourite people, he adopted their taste in composition; and, when seated on the throne, soon rendered it fashionable, partly by direct patronage, but still more by that contemptible policy which, for a time, made England the last of the nations, and raised Louis the Fourteenth to a height of power and fame, such as no French sovereign had ever before attained.

It was to please Charles that rhyme was first introduced into our plays. Thus, a rising blow, which would at any time have been mortal, was dealt to the English Drama, then just recovering from its languishing condition. Two detestable manners, the indigenous and the imported, were now in a state of alternate conflict and amalgamation. The bombastic meanness of the new style was blended with the ingenious absurdity of the old; and the mixture produced something which the world had never before seen, and which, we hope, it will never see again,—something, by the side of which the worst nonsense of all other ages appears to advantage,—something which those who have attempted to caricature it, have, against their will, been forced to flatter,—of which the tragedy of Bayes is a very favourable specimen. What Lord Dorset observed to Edward Howard, might have been addressed to almost all his contemporaries:—

> "As skilful divers to the bottom fall,
> Swifter than those who cannot swim at all;
> So, in this way of writing without thinking,
> Thou hast a strange alacrity in sinking."

From this reproach some clever men of the world must be excepted, and among them Dorset himself. Though by no means great poets, or even good versifiers, they always wrote with meaning, and sometimes with wit. Nothing indeed more strongly shows to what a miserable state literature had fallen, than the immense superiority which the occasional rhymes, carelessly thrown on paper by men of this class, possess over the elaborate productions of almost all the professed authors. The reigning taste was so bad, that the success of a writer was in inverse proportion to his labour, and to his desire of excellence. An exception must be made for Butler, who had as much wit and learning as Cowley, and who knew, what Cowley never knew, how to use them. A great command of homely good English distinguishes him still more from the other writers of the time. As for Gondibert, those may criticise it who can read it. Imagination was extinct. Taste was depraved. Poetry, driven from palaces, colleges, and theatres, had found an asylum in the obscure dwelling, where a Great Man, born out of due season, in disgrace, penury, pain, and blindness, still kept uncontaminated a character and a genius worthy of a better age.

Every thing about Milton is wonderful; but nothing is so wonderful as that, in an age so unfavourable to poetry, he should have produced the greatest of modern epic poems. We are not sure that this is not in some degree to be attributed to his want of sight. The imagination is notoriously most active when the external world is shut out. In sleep its illusions are perfect. They produce all the effect of realities. In darkness its visions are always more distinct than in the light. Every

person who amuses himself with what is called building castles in the air, must have experienced this. We know artists who, before they attempt to draw a face from memory, close their eyes, that they may recall a more perfect image of the features and the expression. We are therefore inclined to believe, that the genius of Milton may have been preserved from the influence of times so unfavourable to it, by his infirmity. Be this as it may, his works at first enjoyed a very small share of popularity. To be neglected by his contemporaries was the penalty which he paid for surpassing them. His great poem was not generally studied or admired, till writers far inferior to him had, by obsequiously cringing to the public taste, acquired sufficient favour to reform it.*

ON THE VICISSITUDES IN THE HISTORY AND PROGRESS OF POETRY.†

Lord Byron has clear titles to applause, in the spirit and beauty of his diction and versification, and the splendour of many of his descriptions: But it is to his pictures of the stronger passions, that he is indebted for the fulness of his fame. He has delineated, with unequalled force and fidelity, the workings of those deep and powerful emotions, which alternately enchant and agonise the minds that are exposed to their inroads; and represented, with a terrible energy, those struggles and sufferings and exaltations, by which the spirit is at once torn and transported, and traits of divine inspiration, or demoniacal possession, thrown across the tamer features of humanity. It is by this spell, chiefly, we think, that he has fixed the admiration of the public; and while other poets delight by their vivacity, or enchant by their sweetness, he alone has been able to *command* the sympathy, even of reluctant readers, by the natural magic of his moral sublimity, and the terrors and attractions of those overpowering feelings, the depths and the heights of which he seems to have so successfully explored. All the considerable poets of the present age have, indeed, possessed this gift in a greater or lesser degree: but there is no man, since the time of Shakspeare himself, in whom it has been made manifest with greater fulness and splendour, than in the noble author before us: and there are various considerations that lead us to believe, that it is chiefly by its means that he has attained the supremacy with which he seems now to be invested.

It must have occurred, we think, to every one who has attended to the general history of poetry, and to its actual condition among ourselves, that it is destined to complete a certain cycle, or great revolution, with respect at least to some of its essential qualities; and that we are now coming round to a taste and tone of composition, more nearly akin to that which distinguished the beginning of its progress, than any that has prevailed in the course of it.

In the rude ages, when such compositions originate, men's passions are

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* See the opinions of the writer of this Essay on Dryden's talents as a poet, in Part the First of this volume.

† Lord Byron's Corsair and Bride of Abydos. — Vol. xxiii. p. 198. April, 1814.

violent, and their sensibility dull. Their poetry deals therefore in strong emotions, and displays the agency of powerful passions; both because these are the objects with which they are most familiar in real life, and because nothing of a weaker cast could make any impression on the rugged natures for whose entertainment they are devised.

As civilisation advances, men begin to be ashamed of the undisguised vehemence of their primitive emotions; and learn to subdue, or at least to conceal, the fierceness of their natural passions. The first triumph of regulated society, is to be able to protect its members from actual violence; and the first trait of refinement in manners, is to exclude the coarseness and offence of unrestrained and selfish emotions. The complacency, however, with which these achievements are contemplated, naturally leads to too great an admiration of the principle from which they proceed. All manifestation of strong feeling is soon proscribed as coarse and vulgar; and first a cold and ceremonious politeness, and afterwards a more gay and heartless dissipation, represses, and in part eradicates, the warmer affections and generous passions of our nature, along with its more dangerous and turbulent emotions. It is needless to trace the effects of this revolution in the manners and opinions of society upon that branch of literature, which necessarily reflects all its variations. It is enough to say, in general, that, in consequence of this change, poetry becomes first pompous and stately — then affectedly refined and ingenious—and finally gay, witty, discursive, and familiar.

There is yet another stage, however, in the history of man and his inventions. When the pleasures of security are no longer new, and the dangers of excessive or intemperate vehemence cease to be thought of in the upper ranks of society, it is natural that the utility of the precautions which had been taken against them should be brought into question, and their severity in a great measure relaxed. There is in the human breast a certain avidity for strong sensations, which cannot be long repressed even by the fear of serious disaster. The consciousness of having subdued and disarmed the natural violence of mankind, is sufficiently lively to gratify this propensity, so long as the triumph is recent, and the hazards still visible from which it has effected our deliverance. In like manner, while it is a new thing, and somewhat of a distinction, to be able to laugh gracefully at all things, the successful derision of affection and enthusiasm is found to do pretty nearly as well as their possession; and hearts comfortably hardened by dissipation feel little want of gratifications which they have almost lost the capacity of receiving. When these, however, come to be but vulgar accomplishments—when generations have passed away, during which all persons of education have employed themselves in doing the same frivolous things, with the same despair either of interest or glory, it can scarcely fail to happen, that the more powerful spirits will awaken to a sense of their own degradation and unhappiness;—a disdain and impatience of the petty pretensions and joyless elegances of fashion will gradually arise: and strong and natural sensations will again be sought, without dread of their coarseness, in every scene which promises to supply them. This is the stage of society in which fanaticism has its second birth, and political enthusiasm its first true developement—when plans of visionary reform and schemes of boundless ambition are conceived, and almost realised, by the energy with which they are pursued—the era of revolutions and projects—of vast performances, and infinite expectations.

Poetry, of course, reflects and partakes in this great transformation.

It becomes more enthusiastic, authoritative, and impassioned; and feeling the necessity of dealing in more powerful emotions than suited the tranquil and frivolous age which preceded, naturally goes back to those themes and characters which animated the energetic lays of its first rude inventors. The feats of chivalry, and the loves of romance*, are revived with more than their primitive wildness and ardour. For the sake of the natural feeling they contain, the incidents and diction of the old vulgar ballads are once more imitated and surpassed; and poetry does not disdain, in pursuit of her new idol of strong emotion, to descend to the very lowest conditions of society, and to stir up the most revolting dregs of utter wretchedness and depravity.

This is the age to which we are now arrived: — and if we have rightly seized the principle by which we think its peculiarities are to be accounted for, it will not be difficult to show, that the poet who has devoted himself most exclusively, and most successfully, to the delineation of the stronger and deeper passions, is likely to be its reigning favourite. Neither do we think that we can have essentially mistaken that principle: — at least it is a fact, independent of all theory, not only that all the successful poets of the last twenty years have dealt much more in powerful sensations, than those of the century that went before; but that, in order to attain this object, they have employed themselves upon subjects which would have been rejected as vulgar and offensive by the fastidious delicacy of that age of fine writing. Instead of ingenious essays, elegant pieces of gallantry, and witty satires all stuck over with classical allusions, we have, in our popular poetry, the dreams of convicts, and the agonies of gipsy women, — and the exploits of buccaneers, freebooters, and savages — and pictures to shudder at, of remorse, revenge, and insanity — and the triumph of generous feelings in scenes of anguish and terror — and the heroism of low-born affection, and the tragedies of vulgar atrocity. All these various subjects have been found interesting, and have succeeded, in different degrees, in spite of accompaniments which would have disgusted an age more recently escaped from barbarity: and as they agree in nothing but in being the vehicles of strong and natural emotions, and have generally pleased nearly in proportion to the quantity of that emotion they conveyed, it is difficult not to conclude, that they have pleased only for the sake of that quality — a growing appetite for which may be regarded as the true characteristic of this age of the world.

In selecting subjects and characters for this purpose, it was not only natural, but in a great measure necessary, to go back to the only ages when strong passions were indulged, or at least displayed without control, by persons in the better ranks of society; in the same way as, in order to get perfect models of muscular force and beauty, we still find that we must go back to the works of those days when men went almost naked, and were raised to the rank of heroes for feats of bodily strength and activity. The savages and barbarians that are still to be found in the world, are, no doubt, very exact likenesses of those whom civilisation has driven out of it; and they may be used accordingly for most of the purposes for which

* The Greek and Roman classics afford no resource in this emergency; partly because by far the greater part of them belong to a period of society as artificial, and as averse to the undisguised exhibition of natural passions, as that which preceded this revulsion; and partly because, at all events, the study of them is associated with the coldest and dullest period of modern literature, and their mythology and other jargon incorporated with the compositions that come now to be looked upon with the greatest derision and disdain.

their ancient prototypes are found serviceable. In poetry, however, it happens again, as in sculpture, that it is safer, at least for a moderate genius, rather to work upon the relics we have of antiquity, than upon what is most nearly akin to it among our own contemporaries; both because there is a certain charm and fascination in what is ancient and long remembered, and because those particular modifications of energetic forms and characters, which have already been made the subject of successful art, can be more securely and confidently managed in imitation, than the undefined vastness of a natural condition, however analogous to that from which they were selected. Mr. Southey, accordingly, who has gone in search of strong passions among the savages of America, and the gods and enchanters of India, has had far less success than Mr. Scott, who has borrowed his energies from the more familiar scenes of European chivalry, and built his fairy castles with materials already tried and consecrated in the fabric of our old romances. The noble author before us has been obliged, like them, to go out of his own age and country in quest of the same indispensable ingredients; and his lot has fallen among the Turks and Arabs of the Mediterranean; — ruffians and desperadoes, certainly not much more amiable in themselves than the worst subjects of the others, — but capable of great redemption in the hands of a poet of genius, by being placed within the enchanted circle of ancient Greece, and preserving among them so many vestiges of Roman pride and magnificence. There is still one general remark, however, to be made, before coming immediately to the merit of the pieces before us.

Although the necessity of finding beings capable of strong passions, thus occasions the revival, in a late stage of civilisation, of the characters and adventures which animated the poetry of rude ages, it must not be thought that they are made to act and feel, on this resurrection, exactly as they did in their first natural presentation. They were then produced, not as exotics, or creatures of the imagination, but merely as better specimens of the ordinary nature with which their authors were familiar; and the astonishing situations and appalling exploits in which they were engaged, were but a selection from the actual occurrences of the times. Neither the heroes themselves, nor their first celebrators, would have perceived any sublimity in the character itself, or the tone of feeling which such scenes and such exploits indicate to the more reflecting readers of a distant generation; and would still less have thought of analysing the workings of those emotions, or moralising on the incidents to which they gave birth. In this primitive poetry, accordingly, we have rather the result than the delineation of strong passions — the events which they produce, rather than the energy that produces them. The character of the agent is unavoidably disclosed, indeed, in short and impressive glimpses — but it is never made the direct subject of exhibition; and the attention of the reader is always directed to what he does — not to what he feels. A more refined, reflecting, and sensitive generation, indeed, in reading these very legends, supposes what *must* have been felt, both before and after the actions that are so minutely recorded; and thus lends to them, from the stores of its own sensibility, a dignity and an interest which they did not possess in the minds of their own rude composers. When the same scenes and characters, however, are ultimately called back to feed the craving of a race disgusted with heartless occupations for natural passions and overpowering emotions, it would go near to defeat the very object of their revival, if these passions were still left to indicate themselves only by the giant vestiges of outrageous deeds, or acts of daring

and desperation. The passion itself must now be portrayed — and all its fearful workings displayed in detail before us. The minds of the great agents must be unmasked for us — and all the anatomy of their throbbing bosoms laid open to our gaze. We must be made to understand what they feel, and enjoy, and endure; — and all the course and progress of their *possession*, and the crossing and mingling of their opposite affections, must be rendered sensible to our touch; till, without regard to their external circumstances, we can enter into all the motions of their hearts, and read, and shudder as we read, the secret characters which stamp the capacity of unlimited suffering on a nature which we feel to be our own.

It is chiefly by these portraitures of the interior of human nature that the poetry of the present day is distinguished from all that preceded it — and the difference is perhaps most conspicuous when the persons and subjects are borrowed from the poetry of an earlier age. Not only is all this anatomy of the feelings superadded to the primitive legend of exploits, but in many cases feelings are imputed to the agents, of which persons in their condition were certainly incapable, and which no description could have made intelligible to their contemporaries — while, in others, the want of feeling, probably a little exaggerated beyond nature also, is dwelt upon, and made to produce great effect as a trait of singular atrocity, though far too familiar to have excited any sensation either in the readers or spectators of the times to which the adventures naturally belong. Our modern poets, in short, have borrowed little more than the situations and unrestrained passions of the state of society from which they have taken their characters — and have added all the sensibility and delicacy from the stores of their own experience. They have lent their knights and squires of the fifteenth century the deep reflection and considerable delicacy of the nineteenth,— and combined the desperate and reckless valour of a buccaneer or corsair of any age, with the refined gallantry and sentimental generosity of an English gentleman of the present day. The combination we believe to be radically incongruous; but it was almost indispensable to the poetical effect that was in contemplation. The point was, to unite all the fine and strong feelings to which cultivation and reflection alone can give birth, with those manners and that condition of society, in which passions are uncontrolled, and their natural indications manifested without reserve. It was necessary, therefore, to unite two things that never did exist together in any period of society; and the union, though it may startle sober thinkers a little, is perhaps within the legitimate prerogatives of poetry. The most outrageous and the least successful attempt of this sort we remember, is that of Mr. Southey, who represents a wild Welsh chieftain, who goes a buccaneering to America in the twelfth century, with all the softness, decorum, and pretty behaviour of Sir Charles Grandison. But the incongruity itself is universal — from Campbell, who invests a Pennsylvanian farmer with the wisdom and mildness of Socrates, and the dignified manners of an old Croix de St. Louis — to Scott, who makes an old, bloody-minded, and mercenary ruffian talk like a sentimental hero and poet in his latter days — or the author before us, who has adorned a merciless corsair, on a rock in the Mediterranean, with every virtue under heaven — except common honesty.*

* In vol. xi. p. 455. of the Quarterly Review, the writer of an able critique on Lord Byron's Corsair and Lara, opposes with great force and ingenuity the theory

Of that noble author, and the peculiarity of his manner, we have not much more to say. His object obviously is, to produce a great effect, partly by the novelty of his situations, but chiefly by the force and energy of his sentiments and expressions; and the themes which he has selected, though perhaps too much resembling each other, are unquestionably well adapted for this purpose. There is something grand and imposing in the unbroken stateliness, courage, and heroic bigotry of a Turk of the higher order; and a certain voluptuous and barbaric pomp about his establishment, that addresses itself very forcibly to the imagination. His climate too, and most of its productions, are magnificent—and glow with a raised and exotic splendour; but the ruins of Grecian art, and of Grecian liberty and glory, with which he is surrounded, form by far the finest of his accompaniments. There is nothing, we admit, half so trite in poetry as commonplaces of classical enthusiasm; but it is for this very reason that we admire the force of genius by which Lord Byron has contrived to be original, natural, and pathetic, upon a subject so unpromising, and apparently so long exhausted. How he has managed it, we do not yet exactly understand; though it is partly, we have no doubt, by placing us in the midst of the scene as it actually exists, and superadding the charm of enchanting landscape to that of interesting recollections. Lord Byron, we think, is the only modern poet who has set before our eyes a visible picture of the present aspect of scenes so famous in story; and, instead of feeding us with the unsubstantial food of historical associations, has spread around us the blue waters and dazzling skies, the ruined temples and dusky olives, the desolated cities and turbaned population, of modern Attica. We scarcely knew before that Greece was still a beautiful country.

He has also made a fine use of the gentleness and submission of the females of these regions, as contrasted with the lordly pride and martial ferocity of the men: and though we suspect he has lent them more *soul* than of right belongs to them, as well as more delicacy and reflection; yet there is something so true to female nature in general, in his representations of this sort, and so much of the Oriental softness and acquiescence in his particular delineations, that it is scarcely possible to refuse the picture the praise of being characteristic and harmonious, as well as eminently sweet and beautiful in itself.

The other merits of his composition are such as his previous publications had already made familiar to the public,—an unparalleled rapidity of narrative, and condensation of thoughts and images—a style always vigorous and original, though sometimes quaint and affected, and more frequently strained, harsh, and abrupt—a diction and versification invariably spirited, and almost always harmonious and emphatic: nothing diluted in short, or diffused into weakness, but full of life, and nerve, and activity—expanding only in the eloquent expression of strong and favourite affections, and every where else concise, energetic, and impetuous—hurrying on with a disdain of little ornaments and accuracies, and not always very solicitous about being comprehended by readers of inferior capacity.

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so eloquently expounded by the author of the above Essay. The discussion is interesting to those who take delight in tracing the causes which operate upon the character and progress of poetry. For the information of the reader, I have transcribed in the Appendix a large portion of the dissertation to which I allude.

HISTORY OF THE DRAMA.*

THERE were at Athens various funds applicable to public purposes; one of which, and among the most considerable, was called τὸ θεωρικὸν or τὰ θεωρικὰ, and appropriated for the expenses of sacrifices, processions, festivals, spectacles, and of the Theatres. The citizens were admitted to the theatres for some time gratis; but in consequence of the disturbances caused by multitudes crowding to get seats, to introduce order, and, as the phrase is, to keep out improper persons, a small sum of money was afterwards demanded for admission. That the poorer classes, however, might not be deprived of their favourite gratification, they received from the treasury, out of this fund, the price of a seat, — and thus peace and regularity were secured, and the fund still applied to its original purpose. The money that was taken at the doors, having served as a ticket, was expended, together with that which had not been used in this manner, to maintain the edifice itself, and to pay the manifold charges of the representation.

It had been enacted by a general law, that in time of war the surplus of every branch of the revenue should be applied to military purposes; this, of course, included the θεωρικὸν; and, moreover, by a particular decree, the whole of that fund was not unfrequently thus appropriated: but as such appropriations were rather unpopular, and had sometimes been made improperly, it was made a capital offence, on the motion of one Eubulus, to attempt to apply the theatrical fund to carry on a war. Θανάτῳ ζημιῶσθαι, εἴ τις ἐπιχειρυίη μεταποιεῖν τὰ θεωρικὰ στρατιωτικὰ, are the words of Ulpian. By this decree the Athenians were, in some measure, secured against a hasty misapplication; as it made two steps necessary, where one only had been required — it being now indispensable to procure a repeal of the penal decree before the question of the application of the money could be prudently moved; and thus necessitating a deliberate consideration of a measure so important as the commencement of a war.

It is curious to observe with how much virulence the people of Athens have been calumniated for passing this decree; with what an absurd violence the enemies of what they call luxury, and of the human species, the fast friends of asceticism and of war, have in all times reiterated the same censure, and with what a blind credulity the vulgar have re-echoed the cry. If we consider the advantages which the Athenians, and indeed the whole civilised world, derived from the Greek theatre, and the small benefits, or rather the miserable calamities, occasioned by their wars of aggression — in other words, by almost all the wars in which they engaged — we shall be induced to look upon the decree of Eubulus as a most salutary law, which forbade turbulent spirits to consume a fund, raised for the great purposes of public instruction and civilisation, in promoting waste, slaughter, and barbarism.

The matter is not without interest, if we view it only as a portion of ancient history, and as it respects the manners and policy of times long gone by; but it is far more important, if we bring it home to our own days, and ask ourselves whether *our own* θεωρικὰ have not often been taken from us, and applied, when there was no Eubulus at hand to help us, to those very purposes which the much-censured Athenians so wisely sought

* Seven Years of the King's Theatre. By John Ebers. — Vol. xlix. p. 317. June, 1829.

to prevent? It cannot be denied that this fund, with us—the fund for supporting elegant arts, and embuing the body of the people with noble tastes and refined sentiments—has been frequently seized on by anticipation,—not only before it was collected in the treasury of the theatre, but before it was accumulated in the hands of the opulent individuals who would otherwise have created and applied it; and that it has been expended upon wars, that were purely and peculiarly wars of aggression. Why, we would also ask, is the influence of our theatres so small, seeing that in a free country their power ought to be great? Why do men of worth refuse almost unanimously to visit them? Why will no man of real talent write for them? These questions, and such as these, continually occur to all who reflect upon the present state of our society; and we will briefly discuss, and endeavour to solve some of them.

Travellers inform us, that savages, even in a very rude state, are found to divert themselves by imitating some common event in life: but it is not necessary to leave our own quiet homes, to satisfy ourselves that dramatic representations are natural to man. All children delight in mimicking action; many of their amusements consist in such performances, and are in every sense *plays*. It is curious, indeed, to observe at how early an age the young of the most imitative of animals, man, begin to copy the actions of others; how soon the infant displays its intimate conviction of the great truth, that "all the world's a stage." The baby does not imitate those acts only, that are useful and necessary to be learned; but it instinctively mocks useless and unimportant actions and unmeaning sounds, for its amusement, and for the mere pleasure of imitation, and is evidently much delighted when it is successful. The diversions of children are very commonly dramatic. When they are not occupied with their hoops, tops, and balls, or engaged in some artificial game, they amuse themselves in playing at soldiers, in being at school, or at church, in going to market, in receiving company; and they imitate the various employments of life with so much fidelity, that the theatrical critic, who delights in chaste acting, will often find less to censure in his own little servants in the nursery, than in his Majesty's servants in a theatre-royal. When they are somewhat older they dramatise the stories they read: most boys have represented Robin Hood, or one of his merry-men; and every one has enacted the part of Robinson Crusoe, and his man Friday. We have heard of many extraordinary tastes and antipathies; but we never knew an instance of a young person who was not delighted the first time he visited a theatre. The true enjoyment of life consists in action; and happiness, according to the peripatetic definition, is to be found in energy; it accords, therefore, with the nature and etymology of the drama, which is, in truth, not less natural than agreeable. Its grand divisions correspond, moreover, with those of time; the contemplation of the present is Comedy—mirth, for the most part, being connected with the present only—and the past and the future are the dominions of the Tragic Muse.

It has been a grave question, since the first introduction of theatrical representations, whether they are on the whole beneficial to society, or hurtful? Experience seems to have decided in their favour. Plato, who had never lived in a state where they were not, but, on the contrary, always resided in a city where they were frequent, at the beginning of the tenth book of his Republic, and at the end of the seventh book on Laws, gives his suffrage against them, and excludes them, as well as all poetry, from his ideal republic. Some have conjectured, and it is not impossible,

that the dislike of the elegant philosopher for poets was caused by envy and the spirit of rivalry; or, since it was his delight to invent paradoxes, that he condemned the theatre, because the love of it was so prevalent amongst his countrymen, as to be considered almost essential to their existence; and that if he had inhabited a country in which it was held in abhorrence, the same motive would probably have induced him to recommend the drama as necessary to public welfare and private felicity. On the supposition that he wrote in good faith, it must at least be admitted that he wrote in ignorance; never having had an opportunity of observing by actual experience the state which he recommends: we may therefore believe, that if he had known the inconveniences arising from the want of theatres, as well as those which are occasioned by the abuse of them, he would, perhaps, have invented a commonwealth less inhospitable to players.

At all events, the fancy, or opinion, that the theatre is injurious to morals, is by no means of modern origin; several states of Greece, and especially the rude, cruel, and warlike Sparta, abhorred it as sincerely as the most sour and rigid of our puritans; and there is nothing that has been said by the most bigoted of their writers, which has not been said and written with equal vehemence and austerity in ancient times. The praise of great severity of manners may still be had by persons who will seek it thus; but they are many centuries too late for the praise of novelty. Plutarch, in his life of Solon, tells us, that when Thespis first set up the stage at Athens, it was much frequented by the multitude; that Solon went once himself, and when the play was over, asked the manager if he was not ashamed to tell such a parcel of lies before so many people? Thespis answered, it was no harm to say or do these things in jest, and by way of diversion; but Solon struck his staff with passion upon the ground, and replied, "If lying is so well received in the way you talk of, we shall soon have it practised in serious business." Some strict persons, in like manner, will not permit any expression to be used to children which is not precisely and literally true: but experience proves that we should thereby deprive them of much instruction and innocent amusement; for at the earliest age, and as soon as they can make any distinction whatever, they learn to discern between jest and earnest, and they rarely, if ever, confound them. They can at once tell whether we speak seriously or in fun — and so can those children of a larger growth, the multitude. There have been sects, since the days of Solon — though not perhaps philosophers — who do not frequent theatres, who use no amusing fictions, who never say the thing that is in jest: but we may safely appeal to the experience of mankind, whether the members of such sects, in the serious business of life, are remarkable for a superior worth or veracity. There is, and always has been, but too much falsehood in the world: but men do not learn at the playhouse to speak untruths — nor in reading Don Quixote, or even the Arabian Nights; nor are the most veracious or ingenuous children those who are ignorant of the history of Jack and the Bean, and of his great namesake, the Giant-killer.

It is difficult to conceive a preacher, whose eloquence should generally produce a moral effect upon his audience equally strong with that caused by a moderately good representation of an indifferent tragedy; and we are convinced that the force of comic ridicule, when directed skilfully against a public abuse, would be irresistible: the power of the theatre, whether it operates by laughter or by tears, might, therefore, if duly exerted, be productive of infinite good. Striking portions of history might

be shown on the stage with a forcible and impressive effect; for even the dull history of England becomes interesting in the ten dramas of Shakspeare; and it is perhaps not altogether impossible, that the still duller legends of France might acquire attraction in the hands of a great master of scenic composition. These ten plays are the best specimens we have of the manner in which history may be treated dramatically; and the mode in which eight of them follow each other, reminds us of the trilogies of the Greeks. Young persons, and the lower orders, listen with great satisfaction to speeches, and even to disputatious arguments, whenever they are able to comprehend in any degree the object of them; and they assist at dramatic exhibitions with still greater pleasure and profit. Nor is it profitable for youth to be hearers only; it is good for them to take a part. Acting plays, under proper superintendence, is very useful; it is the best mode of learning to pronounce well, of acquiring a distinct utterance, a good delivery, and graceful action; the memory is strengthened and enriched with plenty of choice words and elegant expressions, and the mind is taught by experience to judge correctly of dramatic excellence.

This exercise, too, is always performed with so much ease and delight, that if it were not beneficial in its effects, as it undoubtedly is, it ought still to be encouraged, as an innocent and acceptable relaxation; and reserved as a reward for past, and a motive for future exertions. It was formerly practised on this principle at our Universities, and continued in force there so long as learning was cultivated; the good old custom is still retained in Westminster School. So long, also, as the Inns of Court were faithful to their original destination — the advancement of legal education, it was usual for the students to act plays in the halls; and great personages, sometimes even kings and queens, did not disdain to attend them; in short, wherever education was, there were theatricals also, as the last finishing of the work.

The Jesuits, who were the most liberal of all the religious orders, and were, in truth, the victims of their liberality, as they were singularly active and successful in education, encouraged dramatical representation in their seminaries. We have this account of their proceedings from Gabriel d'Emillianne, a very hostile witness: —

"The Jesuits take much pains themselves in making of comedies and tragedies, and every Regent is bound to compose two at least every year. To this end, as soon as they have finished some piece of elaborate folly or buffoonery, they distribute the personages thereof to those of their scholars they judge most proper to represent them; and they spend a great part of the time of their classes, or morning and afternoon lectures, in exercising them two or three months before the drama is to be acted publicly. This loss of time would not be altogether so great, in case these comedies or tragedies were in the Latin tongue; but, excepting only some few sprinklings of Latin words here and there, they are all Italian. Their end herein is to make them the more intelligible to the ladies that are invited to them. Amongst the rest, they take care not to forget the mothers of their scholars, who are ravished to see their children declaiming upon the theatre of the reverend fathers, and conceit their children have profited greatly, in being so dexterous in playing the jack-pudding."

He afterwards relates, in a more angry tone, that

"The Abbot of St. Michael's in the Wood, near Bologna, told me there was no harm in all this, and that they did it for a good end; 'For,' said he, 'we sometimes act little tragedies and comedies in the vestry, or in the church, to which we invite our kindred of both sexes, and our friends, to be merry together.' The Abbot, in giving me this account, took notice of some sort of indignation on my brow, when he told me that they made use of the church to

act their farces and comedies in; and therefore would needs excuse himself on that point, by telling me that they were in a manner forced to serve themselves of that place, because the ladies were not suffered to enter the Convent, so that they had no other place where to bestow them; as if, forsooth, it were a case of absolute and insuperable necessity for the ladies to be present, or for them to act such kind of follies. Sometimes, also, they are guilty of most horrible profanations, by building their theatre upon the high altar where the holy sacrament is lodged."

We would not willingly participate in the horror of a writer, who declares that a profanation is great, for a reason which he does not believe himself; yet the practice of acting plays in a church is so contrary to our present habits, that it somewhat startles us. Though it may tend, possibly, in some sort, to remove indignation from the brow, and to excuse the reverend fathers, if we reflect, that in the ancient world dramatic representations were intimately connected with religion, and were, indeed, a part of it; that the theatre, in short, was a sacred place, and that the performance was accompanied by sacrifice. Not only was it so with the Pagans, but with the Christians also, to a certain extent; and when the drama was restored in the middle ages, it was by sacred persons, representing sacred stories, most commonly in sacred places. But of this hereafter. In all religions that have enjoyed an extensive influence, or a permanent establishment, there has been much that was dramatic in the public rites and services; various scenes connected with the foundation, or extension, of the peculiar faith, were represented, although not always, perhaps, with taste and felicity. Except in a few modern sects, the ritual has never consisted of prayers and thanksgivings alone.

It is not impossible that the notion of desecrating our churches, by applying them to other uses than those of devotion, may be carried farther than ancient usage will warrant. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days; and it may possibly be lawful to do good also in a sacred place. It is certain, that they have often been used by pious persons for the best act that man can do to his fellow—for the purpose of teaching. We read of the excellent and eminently pious Sir Thomas More, that "as soon as he put on the bar gown, he read a public lecture in the church of St. Lawrence, Old Jewry, upon St. Austin's treatise *De Civitate Dei*, with an excellent grace, and great applause. In these lectures, he did not discuss any points of divinity, so much as explain the precepts of Moral Philosophy, and clear up some difficulties in history." The Court of Arches, as is well known, derives its name from the church of St. Mary-le-bow, or *de Arcubus:* that celebrated house of prayer was made, without scruple, a den of proctors. It should seem, therefore, that the clergy of former days were less jealous of sharing the sacred edifices with the profane, and did not seek to withhold public buildings from public purposes, under a pretence of extraordinary reverence. However that may be, it is certain that they were not, as now, hermetically sealed; they stood open, at all hours of the day, to all comers. It is only in very modern times, an abuse of yesterday, that indolence and cupidity have conspired to shut out the public from our cathedrals. We read with horror and indignation, but without surprise, the late miserable destruction of the choir of York Minster. The catastrophe seems to have been the consequence of this illegal and barbarous practice; and we may expect to see more of the same kind, unless vigorous measures are speedily adopted to rescue the custody of them from unworthy guardians, who seek to derive vile and paltry gains, by extorting from the curiosity of strangers, fees for permission to admire public ornaments, which are equally the property of all.

If the church had been open, an incendiary could scarcely have set it on fire; or if some maniac had committed such an act, the fire would have been discovered before it had attained an irresistible force. The structure of the building demonstrates, that a sudden conflagration was not to be apprehended; the mischief must have been unobserved during many hours of total neglect, or it could not have consumed an edifice constructed almost entirely of stone. If the church had been open, it could not have been without watchmen, however strong the desire to economise might have been. The fear of damage would have proved a security, and the presence of the νεωκόροι would have frustrated the designs of a prophet, or even of more than a prophet. Those who have often gazed with delight and wonder on that lovely choir, can alone be sensible of the full extent of our loss, or feel sufficient indignation at the monstrous and inconceivable negligence which was really the guilty cause.

The consideration of our cathedrals may appear to some to be remote from the subject we have undertaken to treat; but it is in truth essential to the view which we have taken of it; and it will be necessary to examine the structure of these edifices more minutely, that what we are going to add may be intelligible. As the Drama was derived from Greece, it is necessary, in order clearly to understand its nature, to obtain a correct idea of the Greek Drama; but especially of the Tragedy, which was its most ancient form, and of the grand characteristic and parent of the Greek Tragedy — the Chorus. Now, it will greatly assist our comprehension of this obscure and ill-explained subject, to examine with attention the construction of a Cathedral Church. The tendency, since the Reformation, has always been, in all our institutions, to shut in and to include a chosen few; and to exclude by strong barriers, and shut out as effectually as possible, the mass of the people. We may remark this in a very striking manner in our Cathedrals. The eastern end has been separated by the organ, and by other impediments, from the body of the church, and effectually cut off from the view. We must remove these obstacles, at least in idea. We must imagine that the organ has been restored to its original position, which in many of the Continental churches it still occupies, over the western entrance; or at the side in one of aisles, where we sometimes find it; or, as the mighty instrument is comparatively modern, although of considerable antiquity, we may suppose that it is annihilated. We must also imagine, that all the other wooden barricadoes, especially galleries, and those frightful examples of aristocratical exclusion — the pews — are swept away, and that the whole building is as clear and as open as a heathen temple, or an unreformed church. We shall find, that the whole of the part which we have laid open, is raised by two or three steps above the pavement of the rest of the church, and that the farther or eastern part of this elevated area is again raised in the same way; and upon this highest elevation the high altar, or, as we call it, the Communion Table, stands. The whole of the elevated area, as well as the persons who officiate upon it, retains the ancient name of Chorus in most of the languages of Europe, although it is somewhat modified according to the genius of the language: we call it the Choir, or Quire. In many churches, as in St. Peter's at Rome, for example, and the cathedral at Florence, the high altar is placed more nearly in the middle of the building, and under the cupola, or central tower: but this is not very material.

We must then imagine, that the service used in our cathedrals is performed, or rather, since many ceremonies, continued from a very remote

period, have been laid aside, that more ancient rites are celebrated. We must imagine that we see, on that elevated part of the pavement called the Chorus, or Choir, that body of men which is also called by the same name, attired in sacred vestments, and occupied in various rites; that at one time they march slowly in different directions, and at another time remain fixed on the same spot; that they ascend and descend the steps of the high altar, and that some of them perform certain ceremonies there; that they bear on high and exhibit images, vessels, or relics; that they carry in their hands, at one time, lighted tapers, or torches, at another, sprinkle lustral water on all sides, or waft clouds of incense from burning censers, and especially that they often divide themselves into two equal bands, and that each (semichorus) is in all such actions the exact counterpart of the other; moreover, that they chant during their mysterious operations, and sing verses to the accompaniment of musical instruments, in strange and solemn strains, in strophe and antistrophe, or, as they are now called, antiphones, or anthems; responsive songs, relating to the history of remote periods, prophetic, and of a dark and mysterious sense: the one half of the Choir answering the other from the opposite side of the altar: and that the whole of the nave and the aisles on all sides are filled with a mingled crowd of spectators, of both sexes, and of every age and rank. But we need not *imagine* such a scene: for we may see it ourselves in the greatest part of Europe; and when we see it, we see the Chorus of the ancient Greeks.

Such, undoubtedly, it appeared to the eye; and such were the ceremonies which were performed, although with a different design and object, in the temples and theatres of Greece, and more frequently before an altar in the open air, either within the walls of a city, or at some sacred spot without, and in the vicinity. Let us next imagine, that in order to explain ceremonies of which the meaning might not be very obvious, some person comes forward and recites to the multitude a narrative of the event which the festival is designed to commemorate. Let us, to make the matter more plain, take a familiar and awful example from our own history. Let us imagine that the Choir is engaged in celebrating the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury; and that, in the midst of the performances, which are still continued, an orator recites the tale of the barbarous and sacrilegious murder of an Archbishop, perpetrated in his cathedral, on the steps of the high altar, because, from devotion to a righteous cause, he refused to sacrifice to his personal safety the immunities of the Holy Church. Let us again imagine that the saint himself, arrayed in his pontificals, appears as a beatified spirit, in much glory, and eloquently relates the threats and temptations with which he was assailed, the firmness with which he withstood them, the ferocity of his murderers, whose coming he had anticipated, and his patient submission and calm resignation to a violent but voluntary death. Let us farther imagine, that he sometimes addresses his discourse to the Choir, and sometimes to the multitude; and, to add to the effect of the exhibition, and to render it more edifying, that the Choir, still continuing their ceremonies, affect to feel, in some degree, the awe which such an apparition, if real, would produce; and at one while, address to the martyr expressions full of admiration and compassion, and at another, call upon the people to notice the meek courage of the sufferer, and to behold a just man made perfect.

Now, if we substitute Hercules, Theseus, or Agamemnon, for Thomas à Becket, we have here the original form of the Greek tragedy; or, as it

was first performed on the feasts of Bacchus, the subject was generally Bacchic; and we may suppose that the mythic tale was related by the god himself, by Semele or Ariadne, by Pentheus or Agave, or by some other Dionysiacal character. The drama was at first all prologue; it was a mere narration; and was not therefore dramatic, except so far as the intervention of the Chorus made it such, who, whilst they burned incense upon the altar, and poured out libations and performed the other rites, sometimes addressed themselves to the actor in terms of sympathy, and sometimes demanded the attention of the audience.

The number of actors was increased by degrees, and the place of narration was supplied by dialogue — spirited, passionate, disputatious dialogue — which superseded it in great measure in the Greek tragedy, and in that of Rome, France, and Italy; almost entirely in the new comedy, and in the entire drama of England, Spain, and Germany — a larger portion of it, however, being retained in the Greek tragedy than in any other, either through the force of custom, or for the sake of contrast, in which the Greeks delighted, and to set off the dialogue.

As a part of the drama, the Chorus was at first an accidental ingredient; for we have seen that the dialogue was gradually superinduced and added to it, and invented in connection with it; but it was long continued as an essential part, through reflection and experience of its advantages, and in obedience to the dictates of true genius and good taste. The Chorus may truly be said constantly to vibrate, in the ancient tragedy, between the audience and the persons represented. Sometimes it more nearly approaches the spectators, and seems to form a portion of them — which was perhaps the more ancient practice: sometimes it inclines to the performers, and takes a decided part with them — and this is the more modern method; for in modern plays, which have been intended as imitations of the ancient models, the chorus has uniformly taken its place actually upon the stage. In the ancient theatre, it occupied an intermediate position; and as it often changed its place, it most probably approached, or receded from, the stage or the audience, whenever it was about to throw its weight into the one scale or the other.

The union of the Chorus with the spectators was, in fact, a kind of treachery, although an innocent one, and it was doubtless very efficacious in deceiving; for, to be thoroughly deceived, it is necessary to be betrayed also. The confederate of a conjuror affords a homely instance, but a plain and familiar one; he takes his seat amongst the company, and whilst he seems to share in their wonder, and even affects to participate in their vigilance, he effectually advances the designs of his principal, and is, indeed, essential to their success. He, to be sure, seeks to cheat us only into a childish wonder, whilst the Chorus deludes us into a close sympathy with the woes of Electra, with the terrors and despair of Œdipus. The end is more noble, but the means employed are nearly the same. It is manifest how much passions may be inflamed, and how soon the grand foe to passion, reason, may be lulled asleep, by what is familiarly called *backing:* for when any one is deeply engaged in a game, or is angry, and about to fight, a single word of encouragement from the most obscure and insignificant of the bystanders, if uttered in season, increases the desire of success in the one case, and of revenge in the other, even in the bosom of a person of superior constancy; and but too often succeeds in banishing prudence, when it was not entirely dislodged, and in turning the trembling scales to the evil part. In more important contests, many a brave fellow, whose courage had begun to flag, and his

spirits to droop, and who was about to sink beneath the overpowering might of his enemies, has been animated to fresh exertions, and often to victory, by the cheering voice, or an encouraging sign, a whisper, or a look, from his immediate commander. The sudden appearance of the general has commonly an electrical effect; and the instances are innumerable, in which it has converted, as if by magic, rout and disastrous defeat into complete and triumphant success. So, in the war of words — a species of warfare that seems harmless, but is frequently more destructive than that of the sword — a timid disputant has often been impelled, by a slight encouragement artfully thrown in at the critical moment, whether in kindness or in malice, to rush headlong into perils not less than those of the field, and to gather laurels at least as glorious as those won by the general. Many animals are exceedingly sensible of the power of backing. The courage and conquests of dogs and cocks, as is well known, are greatly aided by it; much of the merit of the skilful huntsman consists in the degree of encouragement he is able to give to his hounds; and much of the art of the jockey in judiciously exciting and animating, at proper periods, the generous emulation of his horse. We may easily believe, therefore, that the effect of the Chorus in assisting the actors was very great; and that it was not the least powerful, when the words that were uttered appear, at first, to have an opposite tendency. When the substance of them is, "Moderate your grief! such is the course of events," the grand point, that real sorrows are beheld, and are therefore deserving of pity, but to a reasonable extent, is enforced by implication; a mode of proof which least excites suspicion, and in the due use of which the greatest art of the orator is displayed. The Chorus, was, perhaps, but the frame of the picture; but whoever has seen a painting without its frame, knows how much of the effect is lost when that is removed. It was like the side scenes of our theatres, which add much to the deception caused by the back scene.

The Music of the choral songs added greatly to the attractions of the theatre: but, as the materials are wanting, it is impossible for us to have any idea of it. Our modern musicians, we suspect, could hardly compose an air that would carry a strophe of Pindar, or of a tragedy. They never attempt a longer piece than a short stanza; and as soon as they have made a sensible melody, they seem to be ashamed, or afraid, of their own creation, and finish it as hastily as possible. The art of suspending and prolonging a melody for a longer time, and then bringing it gracefully and agreeably to a close, seems to be lost. Harmony, at which the composers of the present day chiefly aim, although they strive hard to make it appear to be profound and difficult, is comparatively easy, as those who best understand the subject affirm, and demands less genius and originality than melody. The music that is heard in the Greek Church, as every person has experienced who has ever entered one, is very peculiar, and by no means unpleasant, even to ears that are quite unaccustomed to it. If an experienced musician, and a man of taste, were to investigate the more ancient musical services of that church, he might possibly find the clue to Greek music, and greatly elevate and improve the art, especially in expression, and so far as it is connected with poetry. It is said that important and valuable vestiges of the ancient Dancing, which was also intimately blended with the choral parts of tragedy, as well as the music, may still be found in the East, and in some parts of the kingdom of Naples.

Of the ancient sacred rites, many were performed by females only; we consequently often find a chorus of women in the Greek Drama. Euripides, although he is commonly reported to have been an enemy of the fair sex, seems to have preferred them to men in the composition of a chorus; for of his twenty tragedies, fifteen are furnished in this manner, and of the remaining five, one is a satyric piece, and the chorus, of course, consists of satyrs. In two only of the seven tragedies of Sophocles, on the contrary, is there a chorus of women: whilst the like number of plays by Æschylus furnish three with a chorus of women, and two more of females, but of a supernatural order: in one, the Furies; in the other, the sea-nymphs, the daughters of Oceanus. It would be difficult to select amongst ourselves a class of persons fit to fill with propriety the part, and to perform the offices, of the ancient Chorus, if we were inclined, by way of experiment, to attempt to revive the institution. We have no sympathy in this land with monks and nuns; and, like a chorus of wasps, they could only be introduced into a comedy composed in imitation of Aristophanes. They might, however, be used with advantage in countries where they are still reverenced; and if the principal character rushed suddenly into their church during the performance of solemn rites, to avail himself of the privilege of sanctuary, fresh from some murder, and pursued, not like Orestes by the Furies, but by the kindred of the slain eager for revenge, the union of the dramatic action with the chorus would not want probability, and the whole might be worked up into one consistent fable. The story of Francis the First of France, who, after his defeat at Pavia, came unexpectedly into the beautiful church of the Carthusians, near that city, while the fathers were engaged in the daily service, to seek an asylum in that sacred place, affords an example, from real history, of a hero coming in contact with a suitable chorus.

The expense of the chorus at Athens was very considerable; but it was furnished by private persons, and was one of the burdens, or liturgies, as they were called, which were imposed by law on the rich. The heavy charge was, perhaps, one reason why it was at last entirely laid aside. The dialogue, which had at first been introduced as a trifling addition, and an incident only, gradually increased in importance, and gained upon the original groundwork and foundation, which it at last supplanted.

The climate of Athens being one of the finest and most agreeable in the world, the Athenians passed the greatest part of their time in the open air; and their theatres, like those in the rest of Greece and in ancient Rome, had no other covering than the sky. Their structure accordingly differed greatly from that of a modern playhouse, and the representation in many respects was executed in a different manner. But we will mention those peculiarities only which are necessary to render our observations intelligible.

The ancient theatres, in the first place, were on a much larger scale than any that have been constructed in later days. It would have been impossible, by reason of the magnitude of the edifice, and consequently of the stage, to have changed the scenes in the same manner as in our smaller buildings. The scene, as it was called, was a permanent structure, and resembled the front of Somerset House, of the Horse Guards, or the Tuileries, and was in the same style of architecture as the rest of the spacious edifice. There were three large gateways, through each of which a view of streets, or of woods, or of whatever was suitable to the action represented, was displayed: this painting was fixed upon a triangular frame, that turned on an axis, like a swivel seal, or ring, so that

any one of the three sides might be presented to the spectators; and perhaps the two that were turned away might be covered with other subjects, if it were necessary. If parts of Regent Street, or of Whitehall, or the Mansion House, and the Bank of England, were shown through the openings in the fixed scene, it would be plain that the fable was intended to be referred to London; and it would be removed to Edinburgh, or Paris, if the more striking portions of those cities were thus exhibited. The front of the scene was broken by columns, by bays and promontories in the line of the building, which gave beauty and variety to the façade, and aided the deception produced by the paintings that were seen through the three openings. In the Roman theatres there were commonly two considerable projections, like large bow-windows, or bastions, in the spaces between the apertures; this very uneven line afforded assistance to the plot, in enabling different parties to be on the stage at the same time, without seeing one another. The whole front of the stage was called the scene, or covered building, to distinguish it from the rest of the theatre, which was open to the air, except that a covered portico frequently ran round the semicircular part of the edifice at the back of the highest row of seats, which answered to our galleries, and was occupied, like them, by the gods, who stood in crowds upon the level floor of their celestial abodes.

Immediately in front of the stage, as with us, was the orchestra; but it was of much larger dimensions, not only positively, but in proportion to the theatre. In our playhouses *it* is exclusively inhabited by fiddles and their fiddlers; the ancients appropriated it to more dignified purposes; for there stood the high altar of Bacchus, richly ornamented and elevated, and around it moved the sacred Chorus to solemn measures, in stately array and in magnificent vestments, with crowns and incense, chanting at intervals their songs, and occupied in their various rites, as we have before mentioned. It is one of the many instances of uninterrupted traditions, that this part of our theatres is still devoted to receive musicians, although, in comparison with their predecessors, they are of an ignoble and degenerate race.

The use of masks was another remarkable peculiarity of the ancient acting. It has been conjectured that the tragic mask was invented to conceal the face of the actor, which, in a small city like Athens, must have been known to the greater part of the audience, as vulgar in expression; and it sometimes would have brought to mind most unseasonably the remembrance of a life and of habits that would have repelled all sympathy with the character which he was to personate. It would not have been endured that a player should perform the part of a monarch in his ordinary dress, nor that of a hero with his own mean physiognomy. It is probable, also, that the likeness of every hero of tragedy was handed down in statues, medals, and paintings, or even in a series of masks; and that the countenance of Theseus, or of Ajax, was as well known to the spectators as the face of any of their contemporaries. Whenever a living character was introduced by name, as Cleon or Socrates, in the old comedy, we may suppose that the mask was a striking, although not a flattering portrait. We cannot doubt that these masks were made with great care, and were skilfully painted, and finished with the nicest accuracy; for every art was brought to a focus in the Greek theatres. We must not imagine, like schoolboys, that the tragedies of Sophocles were performed at Athens in such rude masks as are exhibited in our music shops. We have some representations of them in antique sculptures

and paintings, with features somewhat distorted, but of exquisite and inimitable beauty.

It is possible that the Chorus was retained, for a long time, through timidity, and a want of faith in the credulity of the audience; it being supposed, in the infancy of the drama, that the action would not seem to be real, unless it were warranted and vouched by the Chorus, the broker and go-between of the passions, which was neither actor nor spectator, but a kind of middle term, by means whereof the conclusion was to be reached. The mask, perhaps, was used through the same fear; and, for the like reason, the unities were commonly observed. Athens was the metropolis and nursing mother of the ancient drama; all the great creative dramatists of the Greeks were born and formed in Attica. We must, however, except the Doric dramas of Epicharmus, which are unhappily lost. Would that we could recover this Doric Muse! To borrow the words of the rare Ben Jonson, "I would endure to hear fifteen sermons a-week for her!" Of the vast stores of dramatic pieces of the Greeks, thirty-three tragedies and a morsel, eleven comedies, and many lovely fragments, have alone escaped. We have not only to regret the absence of many celebrated masterpieces of the dramatic art, but that those which survive are not as well known, and as generally studied, as their transcendent and marvellous merits deserve. The majority of English writers have displayed an ignorance of the nature and design of the Greek Drama so great, and yet so confident, that it could not have been derived from their own negligence alone, but has been borrowed from Voltaire and other French critics. As persons who live in remote villages are somewhat late in receiving the fashions, and we may see in a country church every female of any pretension dressed in the extreme of the last fashion but one; so, from our insular situation, and a certain slowness in accepting innovations, we usually adopt the quackeries of the Continent long after they have been exploded every where, except in the United States of America: for our trusty and well-beloved cousins, the free citizens thereof have the last reversion and remainder. Animal magnetism, for example, and craniology, when they were banished from Paris, sought refuge in the British isles, and found a hospitable welcome; and the barbarous notion, that a knowledge of the ancient languages and literature is not an essential part of a good education, which was prevalent in France at the time when the leading men of that country were as free from ancient as from modern learning, has unhappily found some advocates of late in our own country. After the fall of a dynasty, which was even more sudden, if possible, than its rise, the rude assertion has been acknowledged to be untenable, and all wise men are anxious to repair whatever is defective, and to supply what has been omitted, in classical instruction and institution. This discarded paradox, strange to say, has found some favour in Great Britain. But, as we have no heroes and statesmen chosen from the ranks and the rabble, no waiters and postilions set to govern the world as marshal dukes, with titles taken, like the sees of our Catholic bishops, *e partibus infidelium*, from whatever place is remote in situation or in sound—from Paphlagonia or Cappadocia, from Taprobane or Monomotapa, from the hither or nether Bulgaria—to whose glory, ignorance dark and Bœotian, and a total blindness, are essential—we cannot believe that such an abominable heresy will take a deep root, or be of lasting duration.

A metaphor misleads the vulgar herd; the phrase, "the infancy of art," or of science, casts a shadow over the matter to which it is applied; and

many persons suppose, on no better authority than such an expression, that the Greek Drama, having derived its existence from a remote period, is incomplete and unfinished, — whereas it is, in truth, far more perfect than the compositions of any later period. The remains of the Greek theatre are, perhaps, the most beautiful of all things, even of the literature of

> " The learned Greek, rich in fit epithets,
> Bless'd in the lovely marriage of pure words."

An enthusiastic admirer has boldly asserted, that Sophocles was the most felicitous of mortals. Euripides provoked Philemon to declare, that " if the dead still have feeling, as some suppose, he would hang himself for the sake of seeing Euripides;" and Aristophanes, by the exquisite beauty of his style, to traduce and ridicule him in the severe and unsparing spirit of envious rivalry; whilst the astonishing astuteness of his dialogue has induced Quintilian to recommend his tragedies to the young orator, as a model of the irresistible in argument and refutation. The subjects of the Greek tragedies are almost always mythological, and unfold portions of the history of the gods. They have therefore been considered, irrationally enough, as being of an irreligious tendency, and to have been expressly directed against the religion of the state; and the same censure, at least so far as the tendency, has been passed on those Spanish dramas which are founded upon religious stories. It cannot be denied, that a blind reverence is always somewhat diminished by entering into the details of any religion whatever with familiarity and minuteness; for it has been observed, that our conviction of the truth of any opinion is always somewhat lessened, in proportion as our knowledge of the grounds on which it is founded is increased. There is no confidence, in short, so firm and so bold, as the confidence of ignorance. On that account only can the Greek Tragedies be said to be irreverent, and so far as knowledge tends to create doubts, to unsettle early prejudices, and to awaken and foster scepticism; but ignorance is not less an evil, or more tolerable, because such is the constitution of the human mind.

These noble compositions, on the other hand, delight all persons who read them, even if they happen to be prejudiced against them when they first enter on the study. They please different readers for various reasons; but every one finds some singular excellence that is in accordance with his peculiar tastes — with his idiosyncrasy of sentiments and opinions.

Modern works of imagination offend the classical scholar by seeking to pamper a vitiated appetite for the intense. The feelings they express are too commonly those of the maniac; and the sentiments are often the extravagant ravings of a bedlamite. These chaste productions, on the contrary, never overstep that modesty which nature enjoins. The language, however overwhelming the situation, however deep the passion, is sober, reasonable, and subdued; and, therefore, exquisitely touching and pathetic. A judicious critic has complained, that too large a portion of the modern drama is occupied by love or gallantry. The ancient theatre was exempt from this imperfection, and from many others. Dramatic composition is one of the efforts of the human mind that requires the greatest exercise of thought. It is a problem of difficult solution, to draw a character who shall display himself out of his own mouth, and shall convince the audience that he is wise, virtuous, and witty, or foolish and wicked, not because the author, in his own person, or by the narrative of others, asserts that he is such, but from the sentiments the fictitious being himself utters. The extreme brevity with which this task has been

executed is only less wonderful than the success of the execution. The average length of a tragedy of Euripides, if we omit the Cyclops and Rhesus, for reasons which it is unnecessary to state, does not exceed 1440 verses, many of which, being written in lyrical measures, are extremely short. Those of Sophocles exceed this standard by about thirty lines; of the seven plays of Æschylus, all, but the Agamemnon, which is one of the longest tragedies that remain, as it contains 1695 verses, (Œdipus at Coloneus and the Phœnissæ having each 1779,) fall short of the average of the other two tragedians; they are of nearly the same length — that is, somewhat less than 1100 lines.

The tragedies of Euripides are remarkable for their prologues, which are introductions, or arguments, or an opening of the pleadings, spoken by the principal character, or at least by a personage of some importance in the piece. They have been humorously compared to the labels in the mouths of the figures in old pictures. They are interesting as remains of the original and pristine Tragedy, which, as we have before stated, consisted of narratives introduced amongst the ceremonies of the Chorus; and they are of transcendent and bewitching beauty. The longest we have contains eighty-five verses; the average length does not exceed sixty. Sophocles has, for the most part, omitted this elegant introduction; but that the omission was not the effect of want of skill, but through choice, is demonstrated by the exquisite prologue of forty-eight verses that ushers in the dramatic history of the apotheosis of Hercules, which he has executed in the Trachiniæ, with a glory and majesty worthy of himself and his hero. Æschylus, in the specimens of his works that are now in existence, seems to be equally divided between the admission and the exclusion of a prologue. The long speeches of the Messengers, who, at the conclusion of a tragedy, frequently relate the catastrophe of the piece, are a distinguishing feature of the Greek theatre, and a relic of the old theatrical *praxis,* which operated entirely by narration, in the presence, and with the sanction and warranty, of the Chorus. Important news was frequently brought very suddenly, and related in public in the Grecian states, by messengers who had been eye-witnesses of the events they told. The states were of small size, and the whole of Greece being of moderate dimensions, the consequent vicinity of the scenes in which the actions had been performed, would facilitate the conveyance of intelligence in this simple and natural manner. As most of the governments were of a very popular form, concealment was impracticable and unnecessary. There were no state secrets; and victories and defeats were proclaimed by fugitives, or couriers, to all the citizens in the market-place. The appearance of the ἄγγελοι on the stage would call to mind, therefore, the ordinary occurrences of real life. A modern messenger, bearing tidings of importance, would seem only a frigid imitation of the ancient tragedians. A writer, who was determined to purchase fidelity of costume and manners at the expense of dignity, ought to announce his catastrophe by the arrival of the wet newspaper — by a paragraph in the fourth edition of the Globe or the Courier, beginning with the words "Extraordinary Gazette."

The division of a play into acts was adopted partly for the sake of giving a respite to the actors, and partly, perhaps, when it was supposed that the imagination of the spectators was more difficult and fastidious than experience has proved it to be, to allow sufficient time for the events to take place in the intervals, which were afterwards related on the stage. Critics are not agreed as to the period when this division was introduced. If the latter reason had any influence, it is probable it was somewhat

early; for scruples as to the power of imagination of the spectators seem to betray the simplicity of timid and infant art.

We have been detained so long by the Greek tragedians, that we must withhold whatever remarks we had intended on a subject of great curiosity and interest — we mean the Old Comedy, which is as little understood as the origin and design of the ancient Tragedy. We are happy, however, in being able to refer those, who desire to elevate their understandings above the vulgar level, as to this remarkable phenomenon of human ingenuity, to a guide so learned and philosophical as Augustus Schlegel. Persons who are not acquainted with the language of the original, will read with much advantage Mr. Black's translation, which appeared in 1815, in 2 vols. 8vo, entitled, "A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, by A. W. Schlegel." A French version was published at Paris the year before; and although it was in part revised by the author himself, the asperity against the French being somewhat softened, it certainly conveys his ideas less faithfully than the English, either because there is a certain repugnance to originality of thought in the French idiom, or because there is much less affinity between that language and the German. The acute and sensible remarks, and great learning of the lecturer, more than compensate for much mysticism, and some painful and violent struggles after sublimity and eloquence. The high tone of morality is very admirable and exemplary — especially on one point, where the unsullied purity of Schlegel, calm and heavenly as it is, is rather suited to a nunnery than to the world in general; until men and women shall consent to suffer the human race to die out.

The Old Comedy was a composition perfectly comical; because every thing was represented in a ridiculous light. It was not, however, as is commonly imagined, a rude commencement of the Art, but was in truth far more perfect than the New Comedy, which was a departure from its inherent character, wanting unity of design, and being, in truth, a mongrel or hybrid variety, that was strictly neither comedy nor tragedy. Modern critics have taken erroneous views of this subject, which may, however, be all traced to the fountain-head — the comparison of Aristophanes and Menander by Plutarch. The Old Comedy was annihilated by the force of tyranny: for it was under the same violent usurpation of power that the spirited censure of Aristophanes was reduced to silence, and the graver animadversions of the incorruptible Socrates punished with death. The future combats of these two great champions, who had exchanged many a hard blow in their verbal sparring (to compare for once the intellectual with the brutal), were intercepted and stopped for ever by the interference of the police! The New Comedy, which we now see only (except a few fragments) in the Latin translations, derived its chief merit from the truth of representation. The Old Comedy, on the other hand, was of necessity grotesque and fantastic, and the characters excessively exaggerated; for, in countries where men live much in public, and there is a perfect liberty of speech, they will be much alike, and there will be a great dearth of that eccentric individuality which constitutes the quiz — a being that can grow up only in narrow circles, and amidst formalities and restraints. In the New Comedy, too, the Chorus was entirely omitted; honest old Saturn had been dethroned by his rebellious children. In the Old Comedy it had been retained; and, like every other part of the representation, which was a caricature of the Tragedy, it was burlesqued and travestied; and, as in the original it was invested with great dignity and solemnity, so in the parody it was reduced to a state of ludi-

crous degradation; when it was not composed of frogs, or wasps, or birds, the members of it were engaged in fooleries, which conveyed a ridiculous image of the august rites performed by the Tragic Chorus. In the present day we have no institutions, no ceremonies, with which, if we were disposed to revive the pristine and most perfect form of tragedy, we should be able to form a Chorus. But if any one were inclined to compose a Comedy in the old manner, he might take his Chorus from two rites that still survive; one, the convocation of the chimney-sweepers on May-day, the other the synod of boys, representing an œcumenical council, or the Holy Inquisition, who assemble to burn Guy on the 5th of November. These are the only processions we now have; the former has nearly been abolished, and the latter has only been retained because it was one of the securities of the Protestant interest against the machinations of the Jesuits, and of that very harmless old gentleman, the bishop of Rome.

The Drama of ancient Rome possesses little of originality or interest. The word *Histrio* is said to be of Etruscan origin; the Tuscans, therefore, had their theatres; but little information can now be gleaned respecting them. It was long before theatres were firmly and permanently established in Rome; but the love of these diversions gradually became too powerful for the censors, and the Romans grew, at last, nearly as fond of them as the Greeks. The latter, as St. Augustine informs us, did not consider the profession of a player as dishonourable: "Ipsos scenicos non turpes judicaverunt, sed dignos etiam præclaris honoribus habuerunt."—*De Civ. Dei.* The more prudish Romans, however, were less tolerant; and we find in the Code various constitutions levelled against actors, and one law especially, which would not suit our senate, forbidding senators to marry actresses; but this was afterwards relaxed by Justinian, who had broken it himself. He permitted such marriages to take place on obtaining the consent of the Emperor, and afterwards without, so that the lady quitted the stage, and changed her manner of life. The Romans, however, had at least enough of kindly feeling towards a Comedian to pray for the safety, or refection, of his soul after death: this is proved by a pleasant epitaph on a player, which is published in the collection of Gori:—

"Pro jocis, quibus cunctos
oblectabat,
Si quid oblectamenti apud
vos est,
Manes, insontem reficite
Animulam."

"As the Greek Tragedy," to borrow the words of an acute critic, "represented the struggle of man in a state of freedom, with destiny, a true Roman tragedy ought to have expressed the subjection of human impulses to the holy and binding force of religion, and the visible presence of that religion in all earthly things." It is certain, however, that there was nothing national or peculiar in the Roman Tragedy. The earlier specimens of Ennius and others, of which fragments remain, consist of translations, or imitations, of the Greeks. The most favourable opinion that can be given of these productions is comprehended by Ovid in one line: "Ennius, ingenio maximus, arte rudis."

The tragedies of Seneca, the compositions of a later period, have nothing Roman in their structure. They are still extant, and it has been said of them, with much severity, but some truth, that they will furnish examples of the misapplication of every mental faculty. The regular

Comedy was of two kinds: the *togata*, in which Roman manners were represented, and of that we have no specimens; and the *Comœdia palliata*, in which the actors wore the *pallium*, or Grecian dress, and the manners were Grecian also; of this kind we have still many examples. It is the new comedy of the Greeks; and, even in the hands of Plautus, it is somewhat dull. Terence gives the ordinary bill of fare, which does not promise much, in these words:—

> "Bonas matronas facere, meretrices malas,
> Parasitum edacem, gloriosum militem,
> Puerum supponi, falli per servum senem;
> Amare, odisse, suspicari."

This elegant and tame writer has handled subjects, in themselves not very inviting, as properly, not to say prudishly, as if he courted the patronage of tutors and schoolmasters, and sought, above all things, to be acted by Westminster boys, in the presence of their preceptors and spiritual pastors, before the Christmas holidays—a most harmless ambition in the poet, and an innocent recreation for the performers! which must especially tend to inculcate the important lesson of being soon pleased, and amused with a little. One of the dullest of our pedants, however, has asserted lately, in an ill-written school-book, that these performances are immoral and pernicious. In Rome, as in Greece, the drama was always esteemed to be friendly to the cause of religion. Theatrical performances were first introduced to avert the anger of the gods; and this pious people believed that Jupiter was peculiarly gratified by the representation of the Amphitryon of Plautus, a comedy founded on a very remarkable *lark* of the father of gods and men. The connection of the Drama with the Pagan religion was one of the grand causes of its suppression. It was this connection, indeed, that convinced the fathers of the Christian Church that it was an evil in itself, and set them upon finding arguments to demonstrate the proposition. In the 4th and 5th centuries, they poured forth incessant and most vehement admonitions against the sin and danger of frequenting the playhouse; but as their eloquence was unequal to the task of putting a stop to the amusements of the people, they were obliged, for some time, to content themselves with debarring the faithful from the participation of certain religious advantages who had profanely shared in the recreations of the heathen. Some vestiges of their regulations still remain; and in France, the practice of forbidding the interment of players in consecrated ground still continues, and has excited great tumults, even in very recent times. Scruples of conscience respecting the lawfulness of theatrical amusements in general have long been peculiar to the Gallican Church; and they are not creditable to a body which struggled so manfully for its independence.

The arms of the rude barbarians of the north were more successful than the declamations of the fathers. They invaded, laid waste, and ruined the western empire, and effectually silenced the poet and the player. It is to be regretted that the Christians, who adopted almost every other institution of the Pagans, and applied them to their own purposes, did not extend their patronage to the Drama. One Ezechiel has written a play on a subject of Jewish history in Greek, under the title Ἐξαγωγή, by which name he designates what we usually term the Exodus, the escape of the Israelites from Egypt under Moses. Some suppose that Ezechiel was a Christian of the second century; but the better opinion seems to be, that he was a Jew, and flourished about 40 years before Christ. It would thus appear that Tragedy had penetrated even into Palestine. Clement

of Alexandria, and Eusebius, have preserved large fragments of the Exagoge, which are collected amongst the "Poetæ Christiani Græci." All that can be said, however, in favour of the tragedy is, that it is not very bad for a Jew. This work proves that the holy fathers might have treated the theatre with more lenity. The Christian Emperors unfortunately assumed also a spirit of intolerance and fanaticism. We find many of their constitutions directed against the players: perhaps these monarchs sometimes felt that they were themselves fit subjects for the stage, and had a secret consciousness that the Comic Muse, unless restrained by fear, might make much mirth at the expense of the sacred and august family. The most inveterate enemies of laughter are always those who are aware that they deserve to be laughed at.

Notwithstanding the Emperors and the invaders, and notwithstanding the angry censures of the Church, we read that, even in the worst times, rude songs, dances, and imitations, still subsisted, and served to divert the gross minds of the ignorant on public festivals and at private feasts. In the 11th and 12th centuries, dramatic representations began to revive, under the ancient Etruscan name, but somewhat disguised; they were called "*Strioni*" "and "*Giuochi Strionali*." The ecclesiastics performed them in the churches, as if they desired to acknowledge their errors, and to make reparation and honourable amends for their predecessors, who had done their utmost to prevent imitations which are natural and agreeable to man; as if they sought publicly and officially to proclaim their belief, that there is an eternal and indissoluble connection between Religion and the Drama. These representations were still more frequent in the 13th century. In the celebrated code of laws of Alonso the Wise, call the Seven *Partidas*, is a curious passage, which shows, that in this century dramatic representations were common in Spain. Clerks and other men are forbidden to act certain plays in religious habits; and it enacts, that whosoever puts on the dresses of monks, or nuns, for that purpose, shall be publicly whipped out of the town, or place, where the offence is committed: "Los Clerigos e los otros omes non deven fazer juegos de escarnio con habito de religion — qualquier que vestiere habitos de monges, o de monja, o de religioso, para fazer escarniose juegos con ellos, deve ser echado de aquella villa o de aquel logar donde lo fiziere a açotes." — *Tit.* 6. *ley* 36. *part.* 1. It is not plain whether the legislator forbade the profanation of applying sacred garments to secular uses, or the practice of making sport of monks or nuns. If the offence was the former, the like scandal has existed in modern times. A very serious character was much displeased, some years since, that in one of the colleges at Cambridge, the surplices, which the scholars wear at chapel, had been used by the young men in acting a play. There is no new thing under the sun! The Church, having assisted in destroying the theatre, after a considerable lapse of time restored it again. It has been asserted by some writers, that the Drama was invented anew in the middle ages, because the works of the ancient dramatists were not in general circulation when the spiritual pieces, called Moralities, or Mysteries, were first performed; but the ecclesiastics who composed them were acquainted with some of the ancient dramatic pieces, if not of the Greeks, at least of the Romans, — if not the best, at least the worst models.

The old chronicles are full of instances of scriptural and allegorical dramas, performed by sacred persons, in sacred places, and at sacred times, which we will forbear to cite. At certain periods, persons of all ranks seem to have vied with each other in eagerness to produce dramatic

compositions, and there was less restraint upon the subject amongst Christians, than there had been formerly amongst the heathen; for even at Athens, as Plutarch informs us, in his treatise on the glory of the Athenians, a judge of the court of Areopagus was forbidden by law to write comedies. We have not, as yet, found it necessary to restrain, by a statute, the facetiousness of our judges. If it were desirable to legislate on the subject, a bill to explain and amend the jokes of many members of the legal profession would be more useful. All religious persons, from the bishop down to the chorister, were equally prone to assist, according to their different gifts, the cultivation of the Drama, and to promote theatricals on all occasions: nor were our countrymen backward in running the race; on the contrary, they were long famous for their addiction to the stage, and their success and skill in every department of the theatre.

Many authors give the English bishops the credit of having first introduced dramatic representations into Germany. L'Enfant, in his excellent history of the Council of Constance, informs us, that these prelates honoured the arrival of the Emperor Sigismund in that city, in order to assist at the Council, by the performance of a sacred comedy, relating to the earliest history of the Saviour, which was, moreover, acted on a Sunday.

"Tout le monde s'empressa dans cette occasion à lui donner des témoignages publics de son zèle et de sa gratitude. Les Anglois se signalèrent entre les autres par un spectacle nouveau, ou au moins inusité jusqu'alors en Allemagne. Ce fut une comédie sacrée, que les evêques Anglois firent représenter devant l'Empereur le Dimanche 31 de Janvier 1417, sur le naissance du Sauveur, sur l'arrivée des Mages, et sur le-Massacre des Innocens. Ils avoient déjà fait représenter la même pièce quelques jours auparavant, en présence des magistrats de Constance et de quantité de personnes de distinction, afin que les acteurs fussent mieux en état de faire bien leur rôle devant l'Empereur."

Similar performances were frequent until the Reformation, when the theatre was applied, and probably with great effect, to a very different purpose. Many comedies were invented at that time, and patronised by the government, of which the object was to ridicule friars and pardoners: but they had their revenge; for the Puritans, whom the Reformation raised up, carried their dislike of Popery so far, that, mistaking the green curtain for a rag, as well as the royal purple, they abolished both the kingly government and the playhouse. The scriptural Drama was destroyed by the Reformation; the allegorical survived, and the scholastic; the latter kind continued to be frequently performed at the universities and other places of education. The most celebrated work in this line was the well-known comedy written in Latin by Ruggles, — which the University of Cambridge "acted before the Majesty of King James," our most pedantic king, — the Ignoramus, which gave so much offence to the common lawyers, because they richly merited the satire it conveyed, and felt the truth of the harsh but just remark of the English translator, who says in his preface, "If the Latin tongue were ever the language of the beast, it is in the mouth of these persons."

"Sive decennali facundus lite patronus
Detonat inculto barbara verba foro,"

says Milton, on the same subject, and thus sums up the whole sin of the lawyers of those days. Their words were certainly barbarous; but so long as they confined themselves to the Latin, they avoided the horrible prolixity of style in which they have since indulged. As to the style in

which the theatrical representations were got up in England formerly, it is not easy to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. We read one while of "the plain and incurious judgment of our ancestors being prepared with favour, and taking every thing by the right and easiest handle;" and that "they were willing to take things in the best sense;" at another, that Lewin and Allin, Taylor and Pollard, who lived before the troubles, were as much superior to Hart, Mohun, Lacy, Clun, and Shatterel, as *they* were to those who followed them; and it is urged, that "it is an argument of the worth of the plays and actors of a former age, and easily inferred, that they were much beyond ours, in this, to consider, that they could support themselves merely from their own merit, and the weight of the matter and goodness of the action, without scenes and machines; whereas the present plays, with all that show, can hardly draw an audience."

It is probable that the imagination of the spectator could without difficulty dispense with scenes, particularly if the surrounding objects were somewhat removed from the ordinary aspect of every-day things; if the performance were to take place, for example, in the hall of a college, or in a church.

The costume that prevails at present almost universally is so barbarous and mean, and it changes in so many minute particulars so frequently, that it is impossible to conceive the hero of a tragedy actually wearing such attire. A more picturesque dress seems therefore to be indispensable; but the essentials of the costume of any time, from which dramatic subjects could be taken, are by no means costly. All that is absolutely necessary in vestments to content the fancy, might be procured at a trifling expense, and the hero or heroine might be supplied with the ordinary apparel of Greece, or Rome, or of any other country, at a small price: we must carefully distinguish, however, between the necessaries and the luxuries of deception; the form, and sometimes the colour, demand a scrupulous accuracy: the texture is always unimportant. We may comprehend, therefore, how the old English theatre, notwithstanding the small outlay on decorations, by a strict attention to essentials, possessed considerable attractions; we may readily believe that there were many companies who were maintained by their trade; "that all those companies got money and lived in reputation, especially those of the Blackfriars, who were men of grave and sober behaviour."

Our literature is remarkably rich in old dramas; but they are of little use to the present age. Fastidiousness and hypocrisy have grown for many years, slowly but surely, and have at last arrived at such a pitch, that there is hardly a line in the works of our old comic writers which is not reprobated as immoral, or at least vulgar. The excessive squeamishness of taste of the present day is very unfavourable to the genius of comedy, which demands a certain liberty and a freedom from restraints. This morbid delicacy is a great evil, for it renders the time of limitation in all comic writings exceedingly short. The ephemeral duration of the fashion, which is all the production of a man of wit can now enjoy, discourages authors. There is no motive to bestow much care on such compositions, and they fall below the ambition of men of real talents — for the best part of the reward of literary labour consists in the lasting admiration of posterity; and as some new fastidiousness will consign to oblivion, in a short time, every comic production, it is plain that such a reward cannot be reasonably anticipated. We are more completely, than any other nation, the victims of fashion. Every thing here must either

be in the last and newest fashion, or it must cease to be. The despotism of fashion in dress, in furniture, and in the pattern of the edges of plate, is perhaps inconvenient — it is, however not very important; but it is a cruel grievance that it should interfere with and annihilate an entire department of our literature.

It is no easy matter, unfortunately, to resist this land-flood; it is possible to submit to be antiquated in taste, but it is impossible to agree to be considered vulgar, or perhaps even immoral.

Restraints are multiplied daily; and they diminish the extent of the empire of comedy; and whenever restraint becomes perfect and absolute, then comedy ceases. Where is the comic theatre of the Quakers? Into that respectable society, in which every action, word, look, and thought, are exactly regulated by rigid and unbending rules, the light jest can never enter. The comic has been defined as a deviation from decorum, without pain; but where the habits have been formed by the severe laws of the modern Draco, the mild Penn — where all departures from the order are of prodigiously great, if not of equal importance, there can be no deviation without pain. One plait more or less, in the border of a cap, the slaty hue of the garment one shade too light or too dark, will cause a groan as deep and loud as the murder of a parent. Yet no one of these offences would be punished with death by a quiet Quaker legislator — or esteemed a proper subject for comedy, which would be considered as unwarrantable as an execution. No great offender would appear on the scaffold, no small delinquent on the stage: but both criminals would be sentenced to undergo a punishment precisely the same in kind, and differing only in duration — the unsocial infliction of hard labour, solitude, hunger, and prayers in some drab-coloured penitentiary. Since these very uncomfortable modes of augmenting the sum of human happiness have been prevalent, and the puritanical practice of enforcing decency, not by laughter, but by frowns, has been in the ascendant, the Comic Muse has seen but bad days. In old times she was more fortunate in England, as well as her Tragic sister.

If our own country be entitled to the first place, we must assign the next to Spain, in dramatic excellence: and we will offer, therefore, a very few observations on the Spanish Drama. It was in the sixteenth century that this theatre reached its greatest excellence. It is said that the works of much earlier writers are extant; but there are no means in Great Britain of seeing them, or forming an estimate of their merits. Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderon de la Barca, Moreto, Tellez, Roxas, and Solis, are the authors of the most esteemed dramas; there are several other writers of less renown, but of great worth. The grand and distinguishing characteristic of the Spanish theatre is a wonderful fertility and variety of invention. It is most probable that the inventive turn of this nation was of Eastern origin; for the East was the native country of marvellous inventions. The Arabians and Persians are possessed of a rich and poetical literature, but they have no drama. Is it because their religion forbids creative imitation? They will not make statues, or pictures of animals, because they fear that at the day of judgment they will be compelled to find souls for all the forms they have made. Are they afraid, therefore, that they will be obliged to supply all the characters they may invent with souls out of their own, or have they other objections? In India, the Drama once flourished; the Sacontalà has been called delightful by those who have read it in the original Sanscrit. It is not fair to judge from the translation of Sir William Jones; for he could render

tame the wildest genius, and possessed the power of making insipid whatever he touched. In times of oppression and barbarism, as we choose to call them, this and other plays were represented; but in the present days, India being free and happy, as all who are interested in making the assertion loudly proclaim, we do not hear that the natives enjoy the theatre or any other diversion. The Chinese have always had a theatre; and it has been conjectured, that in the establishment of arbitrary rules, and the delicate observance of insignificant points of decorum, they most probably leave even the very correct French very far behind them. But to return to Spain — we are inclined to believe that the Spaniards learned of the Moors their chivalric nobleness of sentiment; at least we find many traces of it in the histories of the Mahometans; and the people of the North were certainly as incapable of teaching it, or any civility or refinement, as a herd of swine. The Spanish theatre is remarkable for a high tone of morality; and, as in the Greek Drama, there is a wonderful force and warmth of domestic affection. In the whole of their poetry, indeed, we meet continually great beauty, and great quaintness; or at least what appears so, to a people of a different temperament. We seem accordingly to perceive something of this also in the writings of the Greeks, and we occasionally even find in them sentiments and expressions, which seem in these days whimsical, if not actually ridiculous. There is, moreover, something fantastic in the high and intensely honourable feelings of the magnanimous personages who take part in the action, — something, at all events, not quite comprehensible to men who live and toil in a busy mercantile age. As to the style, the language of the Spanish Drama, in the classical writers, is mere nectar. This glorious idiom, the fairest and favourite daughter of the Latin, like another Venus, is constantly attended by the Graces, and is most alluring when her native charms are least concealed by extrinsic ornaments. Their dramatists have sometimes a good store of quirks and quibbles, but fewer than our own Shakspeare; these are the faults of the times, and may truly be called spots in the sun. The great fertility of the principal Spanish dramatists, as well as many other peculiarities, have been made known so universally by Lord Holland's agreeable and instructive biographical works, that it is quite unnecessary to repeat a tale that has been already so well told.

The illustrious name of Cervantes stands at the head of the list of writers; but we have two only of his pieces, and they are not highly prized. It seems to us, with all deference to critics who are better qualified to judge correctly, that they are commonly rated too low. The one is a Tragedy, called "*Numancia*," which has for its subject the taking of the city of Numantia by the Romans. Without entering into the details of the execution, we will simply ask those who are disposed to detract from its merits, to name a drama, in which pity and terror, the means by which tragic effect is to be produced, are more forcibly excited? The other piece, which is entitled "The Way of Living at Algiers," "*El Trato de Argel*," must disarm the severity of criticism: for who can censure, on account of a breach of certain arbitrary rules of art, this charming picture of real life? It relates the affecting tale of the captivity of the author and many of his gallant countrymen; and genuine sorrows are painted with a truth of colouring that nature alone can teach. It is unusual for an author to introduce himself in his own drama; but this Cervantes does by his name Saavedra, and with an excellent effect; it is not less uncommon for a dramatist to bear an important part in adventures so romantic and so well adapted to the exigencies of his profession. Calderon is the prince of

Spanish poets; his numerous comedies attest his wonderful and various powers. It is not to be forgotten that, in Spain, comedy is of a graver cast than elsewhere; gravity, indeed, is so essential, that one of their dramatic writers seems to consider a grave countenance as indicative of his nation:

——— "Yes un mozo
De rostro grave, y de nacion Hispaña."

It is not on his comedies, however, that the fame of this wonderful genius principally rests. The most celebrated of his pieces are of a more solemn nature; we mean his "*Autos*," or Sacramental Acts: which were dramas on sacred subjects, represented on the great Feast of *Corpus Christi*, of a most mysterious and deeply devotional cast. It would far exceed the compass of the present portion of the subject to convey an adequate idea of these remarkable performances; we have only alluded to them in confirmation of the doctrine we have before advanced, that the Drama is intimately connected with Religion, and not opposed to it, as the vulgar of different ages and countries have sometimes ventured to maintain; on the contrary, wherever it has been most successful, it has been found in the closest and most perfect union. The five most celebrated of the Spanish dramatists actually became monks; viz. Lope de Vega, Calderon, Moreto, Tellez, and Solis. In more modern times, the task of supporting the ancient glory of the Spanish Stage rests upon Moratin; to this he is quite inadequate, but he is not devoid of merit.

There is much that is interesting in the theatre of the Italians; the Comedy of Art, as their extemporaneous comedy is called, is peculiar to Italy. The plan of the drama is accurately laid down, and some whole passages and important scenes are carefully written; but the rest of the canvass is filled up at the will, and according to the means, of the performers. It consequently resembles a speech, of which the general design has been maturely considered and arranged, and certain portions have been composed, perhaps even written down and committed to memory, while the remainder is spontaneous effusion, skilfully and judiciously adapted to the circumstances under which it is delivered, and rigidly confined to the method which had previously been devised. This kind of drama has long been a great favourite with the Italians, and, if we may judge from the specimens which Gozzi has given us, we cannot but applaud their taste; we cannot doubt that the effect of a clever performance, like that of a good speech, which is partly composed by premeditation, and partly *extempore*, is often exceedingly powerful. In the comedy of art, masks are adopted; or we may say rather, that they have retained this part of the ancient practice — at least as to the principal characters, which, as in some of the older representations, are introduced in every piece, and are deemed indispensable; they are not a little fantastical and extravagant. This, and some others of the scenic diversions of the South of Europe, are almost unknown in the North; and it might be well, perhaps, to give a detailed account of them on another occasion: but they are not to the present purpose.

The French are rich in excellent comedies; we only mention their tragedies, that we may enter our protest against the assertion which misguided people frequently make, that they closely resemble those of the Greeks. They are no more like them, than a French marquis, arrayed in his full dress, and ready to dance a minuet before Louis XIV., was like Apollo Musagetes; or Madame, his charming and fashionable

marchioness, when about to shine at the same brilliant court, was a counterpart of the simple and severe Minerva. They are, in truth, very bad imitations of very bad models — of the tragedies of Seneca: they are bad things made infinitely worse. Our own taste, in many respects, is sufficiently unclassical; but we retain enough of the antique simplicity to be quite unable to endure productions, that would be of all writings the most intolerable, but that the dramatic form always imparts a degree of vivacity. Tiresome as the French tragedies are, they are less tiresome than epic poems would be. Difficult it is, no doubt, to read many of the tragedies of Voltaire, but it is far more difficult to wade through the Henriade; and a narrative poem by Alfieri would undoubtedly be still more repelling than his "crude and sere" tragedies.

Our worthy friends and kinsmen of Germany have invented for themselves a strange sort of theatre, with which they are wonderfully delighted: one or two of their most celebrated pieces have been translated, and have been not only endured, but successful. It would be hard to deny the praise of genius to Schiller: but we must confess that we thought Wallenstein tiresome. Their lighter pieces — for, in comparison with two or three denser bodies, even lead is a light substance — seem wonderfully ponderous to pigmies like ourselves. In their serious works they are less happy than any other nation — being cold and phlegmatic when natural, and, after great labour and with much apparent art, they become, for the most part, only monstrous and extravagant. They assert that the Greeks attained their comic greatness by dint of severe exertion. It may be so; and as the ways of Providence are dark, the Germans are perhaps fated to arrive at an exquisite and most elaborate facetiousness. But, until this transcendent mirth shall be worked out, we shall content ourselves with the results of their erudition, which are sometimes more satisfactory. These ingenious and hard-working people toil incessantly to draw up Truth from her deep well. After unceasing efforts, by many turns of the windlass, and having eagerly watched scores of fathoms of dripping rope, instead of bringing to light a naked goddess, they very carefully land another bucket of water!

We cannot conclude our hasty sketch of the principal theatres of modern Europe better than by borrowing the remarks of an acute Italian writer, who observes very justly, that of whatever nation the imaginary characters in a drama may be, they will be always, in many respects, and fundamentally, the countrymen of the author. "In those French tragedies," he says, "which treat of the palaces and princes of various nations of antiquity, we may always trace a certain air of the brilliancy, the politeness, the refinement, and the gallantry of the Parisian court. Whenever the kings and royal personages of the Greek tragedy are represented by the French, they appear totally different beings. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Iphigenia, seem to be Mons. Agamemnon, Madame Clytemnestre, and Mlle. Iphigénie. In the Spanish tragedies, ancient characters and people of different nations display, notwithstanding something of punctilio and restiveness, a certain sensitiveness and haughtiness, which discover the national disposition, and prove that their Achilles is Don Achilles."

"There are few Italian translations of the tragedies of the English; but the Cato of Mr. Addison exhibits the character of that nation, in a certain deep and profound way of thinking, and in a certain unattractive carriage, that are ill suited to the facility of manner of the Romans; and all the persons of this drama seem to be English gentlemen."

It is time, however, to return to the point from which we have apparently somewhat digressed, and to enquire why the theatre is so little encouraged at the present day? The festivity of the people of England has been destroyed; — in what manner, and when will it be restored? It is not impossible that the erroneous notion, that the drama is hostile to religion — a notion adopted through ignorance of the real objection of the fathers of the church, who originally abused dramatic representations, not because they were dramatic, but because they were idolatrous — has in some degree injured the theatre, and interrupted its prosperity. The shutting the theatre for thirteen years by the Puritans was no doubt a distinct and public acknowledgment that the sky was too small to hold two suns — that the conventicle and the playhouse could not subsist together: that if comedies, such as Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair, could be heard at the latter place, sermons would not be heard at the former: in short, that unless they were too much for ridicule, it would soon be too much for them. But this extravagance of fanaticism could not produce any permanent effect. We are inclined to attribute the evil, therefore, to another cause, which we have already named; that our θεωρικὰ have been applied to other purposes. The fund which would have enabled us to pay our way into the playhouse has been dissipated, directly or indirectly, and various and great impediments have been opposed to our entrance, by the same authority. A distinguished jurist, who has carefully examined the constitutions of most of the countries of Europe, and that of Great Britain amongst the rest, wisely remarks, that the benefits of a representative system of government, and of the trial by jury, however transcendent, may perhaps be outweighed by the evils arising from a blind and selfish submission to the insane fury of excessive taxation, and of inordinate legislation: if we have many institutions admirably adapted to favour theoretical liberty, we have at least as many that assist equally well the cause of practical oppression.

By taxes innumerable, imposed immediately, and through every medium by which man is assailable, an universal poverty is created in the midst of affluence, and the private θεωρικὸν of each individual is absorbed; the shilling which remains to him after satisfying his more pressing wants, and would serve to gratify his desire for amusement, by procuring his admission into the gallery of some playhouse, is extracted from his pocket by a tax-gatherer before he reaches the door; and is most equitably bestowed upon that minister for the trouble of detecting it. It may be urged, that the shilling only changes masters; but its new possessor is too busy in laying informations, in taking and tendering oaths, in making permits, seizures, and surcharges, and in being assaulted and obstructed in the execution of his duty, to find time to enjoy fictitious distress.

This, however, is a rude kind of taxation, and betrays the helpless infancy of the art: a spare shilling rarely finds its way now to any man's pocket; the theatrical fund is intercepted higher up the stream, and commonly at the fountain-head, as soon as it rises out of the ground. The amount that is extracted from us by varied and complicated taxation, is not only enormous, but many of the details create innumerable vexations, and interfere greatly with the diversions of the people. It is by no means the same grievance, that the same sum should be raised by one tax as by another; by a tax on income, if such a tax could ever be fairly levied, and by one on consumption. If, for example, the price of wine were raised

to a guinea a bottle, a man of small fortune, who had a friend to dine with him occasionally, might still continue his hospitality without contributing more to the state than he would if he paid a sum annually, that was imposed upon him under some fiscal name, or without one; but as he would feel that he could always avoid the tax, by not using the taxed article, if he were prudent, he would often hesitate, and sometimes forbear from inviting his friend, being of course ashamed to seek to enjoy his society without producing one social bottle at the least; and thus the ancient intercourse of mankind would be interrupted, and the hospitable Jupiter offended at the impious imposition. An indulgent father, and indeed every father, desires that his children should have a competent supply of toys; but if playthings were heavily taxed, although the sum he would pay, if he still continued to purchase the same toys as before, might not be great, and if there were no other tax, he might consider himself fortunate, yet as it would be so easy, at least for the father, to save it altogether, the toyman would soon be compelled to seek another employment. If a tax of five guineas were laid upon each doll, and if, according to the humane and considerate spirit of our revenue laws, it were made high treason in the nurse and babe, and a capital felony in all aidors and abettors, to play with an unstamped doll, that wooden instrument, upon which the maternal affections are made up betimes, like a shoe on a last, would soon become very scarce; and in the next generation nothing would seem more natural than an unnatural mother; we should find one Medea at least in every street. But it is not cruel, they say, to tax mere luxuries and amusements. Alas! what induces men to submit to live every day upon necessaries, but the hope of sometimes indulging in a little luxury? what tempts any one to bear with his elders and his superiors, who are necessarily so grave and so solemn, and to endure to inhabit the same world with men who are wiser and better than himself, but the expectation that some day or other they may make amends, by giving him cause to laugh at them a little? It is the distant hope of diversion at some future time that keeps us all alive. Nor is taxation the only impediment that authority throws in the way; our most illogical magistrates, exercising freely the faculty of simple apprehension, no other judgment than the legal, and no reasoning whatever, have long carried on, but too successfully, a war of extermination against minute theatricals, against Punch and all puppetshows, horsemen, and mountebanks; and they send Mr. Merryman to the treadmill whenever he appears, in order to preserve unsullied the morality of the lower classes — that they may guzzle muddy beer for the benefit of social order at public houses, duly licensed, to promote the interests of genuine piety, and their proprietors, the porter-brewers.

With our uncertain climate and dirty streets, a carriage is as necessary for many persons to take them to the theatre, as a bench to sit upon, when they arrive there: but carriages, horses, and drivers, have long been the devoted victims of the perverse and insane zeal for taxation by which British legislators are distinguished. It would far exceed the limits within which the present article must be confined, barely and briefly to enumerate all the impediments and obstacles that in long succession have been interposed between the free citizen of moderate fortune and the use of a carriage.

In many countries the government actually expends large sums on the theatre. In other states, the rulers of which we are apt to stigmatise as tyrants, much money and great attention are bestowed to facilitate and

encourage the amusements of the people. Such a disposition of the public treasure is, no doubt, contrary to the genius of our constitution; it is not to be expected or desired; but we may reasonably demand, that the sources of innocent, or rather of instructive recreation, should not be dried up rashly, or wantonly diverted by unjust and pernicious interference. The Barons of the Exchequer at Westminster, some years ago, decided, that the scenes of the theatres are painted canvass, precisely the same as floor-cloth, and as such were liable to pay a heavy duty; and consequently that a scene could not be painted without rendering the house at all times subject to the irksome visits of the exciseman. After a long argument, the Chief Baron, who professed to be a judge of paintings as well as of revenue cases, declared that a scene is a floor-cloth; and the three learned Barons repeated his words, like the Echo! This decision seems so incredible, that no one but an actual hearer can be expected to believe it. It was not perhaps of much importance in itself, but it illustrates the feelings of our rulers towards the stage. We ought not, it is probable, to censure the learned judges in this case; the statutes that inflict our taxes upon us are penned with such large words, that they are rather snares and drag-nets, than laws; no one, who has not consulted them with the vain hope of relieving some victim, can have an adequate notion of their inextricable mazes, or of the grasping interpretation they have long continued to receive. There were more theatres in London formerly, in proportion to the population, than in any other city in Europe; now there are fewer; for, by an odious and unjust monopoly, the number is restricted: nor is this, however grievous, the only restraint to which the Drama is subject.

It is fit that a private gentleman should have his chambermaid, and that a king should have his chamberlain; and in proportion as a king is elevated above a private person, his servants ought to be exalted above those of his subjects. It may be very proper, therefore, that his chamberlain should be a peer of high rank, and a great officer of state. It is not our intention to degrade an office which derives dignity from the august personage, on account of whom duties, in themselves insignificant, may become extremely honourable; nor is it necessary, to advance our argument. It would not, however, be less improper for the chambermaid of a private gentleman to presume to determine what dramatic works might be admitted into the library of her master, or read by his family, than for the corresponding domestic in his Majesty's household, however illustrious he may be by birth and in rank, to decide preremptorily what pieces are to be presented for the amusement of his Majesty's loving subjects, the free people of the British commonwealth. It is certain that the Greek dramas were not licensed; we know, however, that the Spanish were, but not by the king's bed maker, or by the chamberlain for the time being, but by a learned body, — by some convent of Dominicans. We do not look upon the government of Spain as very free; we arrogate to ourselves some advantages on the side of liberty over the Spaniards at least; but our theatre is more confined. They were subject only to the censure of learning: however illiberal it may have been, it was still learning; it was therefore of necessity under some restraints. That it might be consistent with itself, it must have laid down some rules for its own guidance; and a sensible writer could understand, that whatever was not hostile to the government or the church would pass: but ignorance and caprice have no bounds, and it is impossible for the most judicious, or the most practised author, to foresee the result, where chance alone is

to decide. In this respect, therefore, we are slaves, even in comparison with the Spaniards. It may be urged, that it is nevertheless possible that a Lord Chamberlain may be a competent judge of such matters. He may be, without doubt, and we have all the advantage of that possibility: he may even be conscious of his own inability, and may appoint a fit person as his deputy; he may always abide by and confirm his report, and the examination is of course always in fact executed by a substitute: but we must not forget, that it is impossible for one, who is himself incompetent to decide, to choose another well qualified to decide for him, for he is not able to judge of his qualifications; we have, however, the chance of his lordship's falling accidentally upon the right person. The very few writers, who are capable of producing dramatic pieces of real excellence, unfortunately estimate these chances so low, that, in the conscious pride of talent, they are unwilling to expose their works to such hazards. Good plays were frequently produced formerly; but it is now many years since a tolerable one appeared. We have had a few successful farces, in which coarse jests and extravagant peculiarities of character have excited laughter, chiefly because the most striking passages were well adapted to display the buffoonery of some favourite actor in the lower departments of comedy. It is long since a regular comedy of real merit was presented; and the few tragedies that have enjoyed even a partial success, have been remarkable only for insipidity, or extravagance, or sometimes for both. The authority of the Lord Chamberlain seems to have originated in the notion, (it may be termed a fiction of theatrical law,) that every theatre is part of the royal palace: but, notwithstanding this reverend falsehood, it would be much better to allow liberty of the stage, on the same footing as liberty of the press; for a free people, it is self-evident, have a right to demand it. Let there be no censorship, but let the proprietors and managers of theatres be responsible in the same manner, and subject to the same suits and prosecutions, whether public or private, as publishers of newspapers and other works: let them, in short, represent whatever they please at their own peril, and at the risk of being punished, if found guilty by a jury. The proprietors of a theatre must of necessity be known, and will most probably be responsible persons. Sermons and discourses, delivered in chapels, are not perused and licensed by any of the household; yet no inconveniences ensue from the omission, although whatever is uttered from the pulpit falls with a certain air of authority. What would be the value of our national literature, if every work were to be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, or his Deputy, and the law were enforced as strictly as it is in theatrical pieces? Would it amount to more than that part of some newspapers, which bears the imposing title of the "Mirror of Fashion?" If our playhouses are subjected to this control, for the good of the state, why are other public amusements exempt? Why are not the paintings in an exhibition licensed, or the horses at public races? The decision that a bay, or a brown horse, might start, but that grey or chestnut are immoral colours, and that mares are of a misleading sex, would scarcely be more capricious than some of the regulations respecting the drama. By what singular good fortune are our private amusements unmolested? How are we free from an ordinance, proclaiming that a loyal subject may play at backgammon, but chess is dangerous to our allegiance, and injurious to church and state, for it induces a familiarity with kings, queens, and bishops, which, if it be not checked in time, may generate contempt? But to speak seriously, the question of the expediency of

theatrical censorship is of so much importance that it is worthy to be treated more fully on another occasion, or in another place.

Dramatic representations were formerly given, not only in Greece and Rome, but in England also, in the daytime, and in the open air. "The Globe, Fortune, and Bull, were large houses, and partly open to the weather, and there they always acted by daylight;" and plays were first acted in Spain in the open courts of great houses, which were sometimes covered, in whole or in part, with an awning to keep off the sun. The word *sale*, which is used as a stage direction, meaning not *exit*, but he enters, *i. e.* he comes out of the house into the open air, is an evidence of the old practice. We are inclined to think that the morning is more favourable to dramatic excellence than the evening. The daylight accords with the truth and sobriety of nature, and it is the season of cool judgment: the gilded, the painted, the tawdry, the meretricious — spangles and tinsel, and tarnished and glittering trumpery — demand the glare of candlelight and the shades of night. It is certain that the best pieces were written for the day; and it is probable that the best actors were those who performed whilst the sun was above the horizon. The childish trash which now occupies so large a portion of the public attention could not, it is evident, keep possession of the stage, if it were to be presented, not at ten o'clock at night, but twelve hours earlier: much would need to be changed in the dresses, scenery, and decorations, and in many other respects, in the pieces, the solid merits of which would be able to undergo the severe ordeal; and if we consider *what* changes would be required to adapt them to the altered hours, we shall find that they will be all in favour of good taste, and on the side of nature and simplicity. The day is a holy thing; Homer aptly calls it ἱερὸν ἦμαρ, and it still retains something of the sacred simplicity of ancient times. It is, at all events, less sophisticated and polluted than the modern night; a period which is not devoted to wholesome sleep, but to various constraints and sufferings, called, in bitter mockery, Pleasure. The late evening, being a modern invention, is therefore devoted to fashion; to recur to the simple and pure in theatricals, it would probably be necessary to effect an escape from a period of time, which has never been employed in the full integrity of tasteful elegance, and thus to break the spell by which the whole realm of fancy has long been bewitched. An absurd and inconvenient practice, which is almost peculiar to this country, of attending public places in that uncomfortable condition which is technically called being dressed, but which is in truth, especially in females, being more or less naked and undressed, might more easily be dispensed with by day, and on that account, and for many other reasons, it would be less difficult to return home.

It is true that, in order to enable the mass of mankind to visit places of amusement by daylight, the salutary notion that was held by our forefathers, but has unhappily been long exploded, must be revived, that it is possible for the sun to be above the horizon, and yet for man not to be at work. That inestimable institution of the olden time, the holiday, must be restored. If Sunday were abolished, it is manifest that not another pound of sugar, not another ounce of tea, not another nutmeg, not another fig, would be sold; at present, people purchase all they want of these articles, and have the means of paying for; fewer groceries would be bought on week days, and these would be purchased on Sundays; the grocers, therefore, would have one-seventh part more trouble, and not one farthing more profit. In like manner, if, by an agreement

amongst themselves, or by a statute, the shops of grocers were shut on one other day in every month, fortnight, or week, as much of their wares would be sold as ever; the business that would have been transacted on the new holiday, would be done on one of the remaining days; some ease would be gained, and no custom lost, by the whole company; and so would it be with all shopkeepers, and with many other classes of trades, — with more than any one would suppose, who does not enumerate them. It is no inconvenience to the public that nutmegs and pepper cannot be procured on a Sunday; nor would it be if the same disability was extended to Wednesday. It would, however, be very incommodious if there were only one day in the year on which spices could be transferred. This is the *rationale* of holidays.

In occupations where the constant unremitting labour of the hands is required, it is somewhat different. Whilst the saw and the shuttle are still, the gains of the joiner and weaver stop also; but if there be an adequate motive for vigorous exertions, every one must have observed, that in mechanical arts, although it may not be possible to put the labour of a month into a week, it is very easy to do the work of ten days in nine. A holiday that has been spent in an agreeable and rational manner, has an invigorating effect, and the anticipated holiday is still more animating; besides, unceasing toil is injurious, and an excess in labour, like all other excesses, is mischievous, and destroys the power of labouring. It has been conjectured, with some probability, that if Sunday were applied to the same uses as the remainder of the week, the quantity of work that would be performed would, on the whole, be rather diminished than augmented. Our domestic animals require rest; a sensible man who employs horses in daily work, keeps a few supernumeraries, that he may be able to give an occasional holiday to his cattle. If this respite be necessary for creatures unincumbered with mind, it is still more so for rational beings. The proverb says truly, "That constant work makes a boy dull;" and it is the quality of dulness which is generated by toil unmitigated by rest and recreation; those faculties that ought to be sharpened to the utmost are blunted, and there is a partial death of the finer and more valuable powers: by injudiciously exacting too much, a race of intelligent servants may be converted into stupid slaves. It is not unlikely that the drama would be more successful if it were conducted more plainly, and in a less costly style. The perfection of the machinery and scenery of the modern theatres seems to be unfavourable to the goodness of composition and acting; since the accessaries are so excellent, the opinion is encouraged, that the principals are less important, and may be neglected with impunity. The effect of good scenery at the first glance is, no doubt, very striking; but it soon passes away. If we saw a Garrick acting Shakspeare in a large hall, without any scenes, we should cease in a few minutes to be sensible of the want of them. We are almost disposed to believe, that exactly in proportion as scenery has been improved, good acting has declined.

The present age is too much inclined to make human life, in every department, resemble a great lottery, in which there are a very few enormous prizes, and all the rest of the tickets are blanks. The stage has not escaped the evil we complain of; on the contrary, it is a striking instance of the mischief of this unequal partition. The public are of opinion, that it is impossible to reward a small number of actors too highly, and to pay the remainder at too low a rate; to neglect the latter enough, or to be sufficiently attentive to the former. On our stage, therefore, the inferior parts, and indeed all but one or two, and especially in tragedies, where

the inequality is more intolerable, and more inexcusable, are sustained in a very inadequate manner. In foreign theatres, on the contrary, and especially in France, the whole performance is more equal, and consequently more agreeable. There is perhaps less difference than is commonly supposed between the best performers and those in the next class. Whatever the difference be, it is an inconvenience and an imperfection that ought to be palliated; but we aggravate it. The first-rate actor always does his best, because the audience expect it, and reward him with their applause; but no one cares for, or observes, the performer of second-rate talents. Whether he be perfect in his part, and exert himself to the utmost, or be slovenly or negligent throughout, he is unpraised and unblamed. The general effect, therefore, of our tragedies, is very unsatisfactory; for that is far greater, where all the characters are tolerably well supported, than where there is one good actor, and all the other parts are inhumanly murdered. This latter is too often the case on our stage; for with us art does little, nothing being taught systematically! The French players, on the contrary, are thoroughly drilled, and well instructed in every requisite.*

SKETCH OF ENGLISH LITERATURE DURING THE REIGNS OF ELIZABETH AND JAMES.†

All true lovers of English poetry have been long in love with the dramatists of the time of Elizabeth and James; and must have been sensibly comforted by their late restoration to some degree of favour and notoriety. If there was any good reason indeed to believe, that the notice which they have recently attracted proceeded from any thing but that indiscriminate rage for editing and annotating by which the present times are so happily distinguished, we should be disposed to hail it as the most unequivocal symptom of improvement in public taste that has yet occurred to reward and animate our labours. At all events, however, it gives us a chance of such an improvement, by placing in the hands of many, who would not otherwise have heard of them, some of those beautiful performances which we have always regarded as among the most pleasing and characteristic productions of our native genius.

We cannot resist the opportunity which this publication seems to afford, of saying a word or two of a class of writers, whom we have long worshipped in secret with a sort of idolatrous veneration, and now find once more brought forward as candidates for public applause. The era to which they belong, indeed, has always appeared to us by far the brightest

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* In Vol. xlvi. p. 368. there is an Essay on the History of Private Theatricals, containing a vast deal of rare and curious knowledge on a subject which has not been discussed by any other writer in so attractive a manner. It has been ascribed, though I know not on what grounds, to Lady Morgan. I could not find room for it without displacing other articles of equal interest. For the same reason, the following have been rejected: a Critique on the Anglo-French Drama, Vol. li. p. 225; and a Disquisition on Greek Tragedy, Vol. xlvii. p. 418.

† The Dramatic Works of John Ford; with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes. By Henry Weber, Esq. — Vol. xviii. p. 275. August, 1811.

in the history of English literature, — or indeed of human intellect and capacity. There never was, any where, any thing like the sixty or seventy years that elapsed from the middle of Elizabeth's reign to the period of the Restoration. In point of real force and originality of genius, neither the age of Pericles, nor the age of Augustus, nor the times of Leo X., nor of Louis XIV., can come at all into comparison; for, in that short period, we shall find the names of almost all the very great men that this nation has ever produced, — the names of Shakspeare, and Bacon, and Spenser, and Sidney, — and Hooker, and Taylor, and Barrow, and Raleigh, — and Napier, and Milton, and Cudworth, and Hobbes, and many others; — men, all of them, not merely of great talents and accomplishments, but of vast compass and reach of understanding, and of minds truly creative and original; — not perfecting art by the delicacy of their taste, or digesting knowledge by the justness of their reasonings; but making vast and substantial additions to the materials upon which taste and reason must hereafter be employed, — and enlarging, to an incredible and unparalleled extent, both the stores and the resources of the human faculties.

Whether the brisk concussion which was given to men's minds by the force of the Reformation, had much effect in producing this sudden developement of British genius, we cannot undertake to determine. For our own part, we should be rather inclined to hold, that the Reformation itself was but one symptom or effect of that great spirit of progression and improvement which had been set in operation by deeper and more general causes, and which afterwards blossomed out into this splendid harvest of authorship. But whatever may have been the causes that determined the appearance of these great works, the fact is certain, not only that they appeared together in great numbers, but that they possessed a common character, which, in spite of the great diversity of their subjects and designs, would have made them be classed together as the works of the same order or description of men, even if they had appeared at the most distant intervals of time. They are the works of Giants — and of Giants of one nation and family; and their characteristics are, great force, boldness, and originality, together with a certain raciness of English peculiarity, which distinguishes them from all those performances that have since been produced upon a more vague and general idea of European excellence. Their sudden appearance, indeed, in all this splendour of native luxuriance, can only be compared to what happens on the breaking up of a virgin soil, — where all indigenous plants spring up at once with a rank and irrepressible fertility, and display whatever is peculiar or excellent in their nature, on a scale the most conspicuous and magnificent. The crops are not indeed so clean as where a more exhausted mould has been stimulated by systematic cultivation, nor so profitable as where their quality has been varied by a judicious admixture of exotics, and accommodated to the demands of the universe, by the combinations of an unlimited trade. But to those whose chief object of admiration is the living power and energy of vegetation, and who take delight in contemplating the various forms of her unforced and natural perfection, no spectacle can be more rich, splendid, or attractive.

In the times of which we are speaking, classical learning, though it had made great progress, had by no means become an exclusive study; and the ancients had not yet been permitted to subdue men's minds to a sense of hopeless inferiority, or to condemn the moderns to the lot of humble imitators. They were resorted to, rather to furnish materials and occasional ornaments, than as models for the general style of com-

position; and, while they enriched the imagination, and insensibly improved the taste of their successors, they did not at all restrain their freedom, or impair their originality. No common standard had yet been erected, to which all the works of European genius were required to conform; and no general authority was acknowledged, by which all private or local ideas of excellence must submit to be corrected. Both readers and authors were comparatively few in number. The former were infinitely less critical than they have since become; and the latter, if they were not less solicitous about fame, were at least much less jealous and timid as to the hazards which attended its pursuit. Men, indeed, seldom took to writing in those days, unless they had a great deal of matter to communicate; and neither imagined that they could make a reputation by delivering commonplaces in an elegant manner, or that the substantial value of their sentiments would be disregarded for a little rudeness or negligence in the finishing. They were habituated, therefore, both to depend upon their own resources, and to draw upon them without fear or anxiety; and followed the dictates of their own taste and judgment, without standing in awe of the ancients, of their readers, or of each other.

The achievements of Bacon, and of those who set free our understandings from the shackles of papal and of tyrannical imposition, afford sufficient evidence of the benefit which resulted to the reasoning faculties from this happy independence of the first great writers of this nation. But its advantages were, if possible, still more conspicuous in the mere literary character of their productions. The quantity of bright thoughts, of original images, and splendid expressions, which they poured forth upon every occasion, and by which they illuminated and adorned the darkest and most rugged topics to which they had happened to turn themselves, is such as has never been equalled in any other age or country; and places them at least as high, in point of fancy and imagination, as of force of reason, or comprehensiveness of understanding. In this highest and most comprehensive sense of the word, a great proportion of the writers we have alluded to were *Poets:* and, without going to those who composed in metre, and chiefly for purposes of delight, we will venture to assert, that there is in any one of the prose folios of Jeremy Taylor more fine fancy and original imagery — more brilliant conceptions and glowing expressions — more new figures, and new applications of old figures — more, in short, of the body and the soul of poetry, than in all the odes and the epics that have since been produced in Europe. There are large portions of Barrow, and of Hooker and Bacon, of which we may say nearly as much: nor can any one have a tolerably adequate idea of the riches of our language and our native genius, who has not made himself acquainted with the prose writers, as well as the poets, of this memorable period.

The civil wars, and the fanaticism by which they were fostered, checked all this fine bloom of the imagination, and gave a different and less attractive character to the energies which they could not extinguish. Yet these were the times that matured and drew forth the dark but powerful genius of such men as Cromwell, and Harrison, and Fleetwood, &c. — the milder and more generous enthusiasm of Blake, and Hutchison, and Hampden — and the stirring and indefatigable spirit of Pym, and Hollis, and Vane — and the chivalrous and accomplished loyalty of Strafford and Falkland, at the same time that they stimulated and repaid the severer studies of Coke, and Selden, and Milton. The drama, how-

ever, was entirely destroyed, and has never since regained its honours; and poetry, in general, lost its ease, and its majesty and force, along with its copiousness and originality.

The Restoration made things still worse; for it broke down the barriers of our literary independence, and reduced us to a province of the great republic of Europe. The genius and fancy which lingered through the usurpation, though soured and blighted by the severities of that inclement season, were still genuine English genius and fancy, and owned no allegiance to any foreign authorities. But the Restoration brought in a French taste upon us, and what was called a classical and a polite taste; and the wings of our English Muses were clipped and trimmed, and their flights regulated, at the expense of all that was peculiar, and much of what was brightest in their beauty. The king and his courtiers, during their long exile, had of course imbibed the taste of their protectors; and, coming from the gay court of France, with something of that additional profligacy that belonged to their outcast and adventurer character, were likely enough to be revolted by the peculiarities, and by the very excellencies, of our native literature. The grand and sublime tone of our greater poets appeared to them dull, morose, and gloomy; and the fine play of their rich and unrestrained fancy, mere childishness and folly; while their frequent lapses and perpetual irregularity were set down as clear indications of barbarity and ignorance. Such sentiments, too, were natural, we must admit, for a few dissipated and witty men, accustomed all their days to the regulated splendour of a court — to the gay and heartless gallantry of French manners — and to the imposing pomp and brilliant regularity of French poetry. But it may appear somewhat more unaccountable, that they should have been able to impose their sentiments upon the great body of the nation. A court, indeed, never has so much influence as at the moment of a restoration: but the influence of an English court has been but rarely discernible in the literature of the country; and had it not been for the peculiar circumstances in which the nation was then placed, we believe it would have resisted this attempt to naturalise foreign notions, as sturdily as it has done on almost every other occasion.

At this particular moment, however, the native literature of the country had been sunk into a very low and feeble state by the rigours of the usurpation; the best of its recent models laboured under the reproach of republicanism; and the courtiers were not only disposed to see all its peculiarities with an eye of scorn and aversion, but had even a good deal to say in favour of that very opposite style to which they had been habituated. It was a witty, and a grand, and a splendid style. It showed more scholarship and art, than the luxuriant negligence of the old English school; and was not only free from many of its hazards and some of its faults, but possessed merits of its own, of a character more likely to please those who had then the power of conferring celebrity, or condemning to derision. Then it was a style which it was peculiarly easy to justify by argument; and in support of which, great authorities, as well as imposing reasons, were always ready to be produced. It came upon us with the air and the pretension of being the style of cultivated Europe, and a true copy of the style of polished antiquity. England, on the other hand, had had but little intercourse with the rest of the world for a considerable period of time; her language was not at all studied on the Continent; and her native authors had not been taken into account in forming those ideal standards of excellence which had been recently

constructed in France and Italy, upon the authority of the Roman classics and of their own most celebrated writers. When the comparison came to be made, therefore, it is easy to imagine that it should generally be thought to be very much to our disadvantage, and to understand how the great multitude, even among ourselves, should be dazzled with the pretensions of the fashionable style of writing, and actually feel ashamed of their own richer and more varied productions.

It would greatly exceed our limits to describe accurately the particulars in which this new continental style differed from our old insular one: but, for our present purpose, it may be enough perhaps to say, that it was more worldly, and more townish, — holding more of reason, and ridicule, and authority — more elaborate and more assuming — addressed more to the judgment than to the feelings, and somewhat ostentatiously accommodated to the habits, or supposed habits, of persons in fashionable life. Instead of tenderness and fancy, we had satire and sophistry — artificial declamation, in place of the spontaneous animations of genius — and for the universal language of Shakspeare, the personalities, the party politics, and the brutal obscenities of Dryden. Nothing, indeed, can better characterise the change which had taken place in our national taste, than the alterations and additions which this eminent person presumed — and thought it necessary — to make on the productions of Shakspeare and Milton. The heaviness, the coarseness, and the bombast of that abominable travestie, in which he has exhibited the Paradise Lost in the form of an opera, and the atrocious indelicacy and compassionable stupidity of the new characters with which he has polluted the enchanted solitude of Miranda and Prospero in the Tempest, are such instances of degeneracy as we would be apt to impute rather to some transient hallucination in the author himself, than to the general prevalence of any systematic bad taste in the public, did we not know that Wycherly and his coadjutors were in the habit of converting the neglected dramas of Beaumont and Fletcher into popular plays, merely by leaving out all the romantic sweetness of their characters — turning their melodious blank verse into vulgar prose — and aggravating the indelicacy of their lower characters, by lending a more disgusting indecency to the whole *dramatis personæ*.

Dryden was, beyond all comparison, the greatest poet of his own day; and, endued as he was with a vigorous and discursive imagination, and possessing a mastery over his language which no later writer has attained, if he had known nothing of foreign literature, and been left to form himself on the models of Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton; or if he had lived in the country, at a distance from the pollutions of courts, factions, and playhouses, there is reason to think that he would have built up the pure and original school of English poetry so firmly, as to have made it impossible for fashion, or caprice, or prejudice of any sort, ever to have rendered any other popular among our own inhabitants. As it is, he has not written one line that is pathetic, and very few that can be considered as sublime.

Addison, however, was the consummation of this continental style; and if it had not been redeemed about the same time by the fine talents of Pope, would probably have so far discredited it, as to have brought us back to our original faith half a century ago. The extreme caution, timidity, and flatness of this author in his poetical compositions — the narrowness of his range in poetical sentiment and diction, and the utter want either of passion or of brilliancy, render it difficult to believe that

he was born under the same sun with Shakspeare, and wrote but a century after him. His fame, at this day, stands solely upon the delicacy, the modest gaiety, and ingenious purity of his prose style;—for the occasional elegance and small ingenuity of his poems can never redeem the poverty of their diction, and the tameness of their conception. Pope has incomparably more spirit, and taste, and animation: but Pope is a satirist, and a moralist, and a wit, and a critic, and a fine writer, much more than he is a poet. He has all the delicacies, and proprieties, and felicities of diction — but he has not a great deal of fancy, and scarcely ever touches any of the greater passions. He is much the best, we think, of the classical continental school; but he is not to be compared with the masters — nor with the pupils — of that old English one from which there had been so lamentable an apostasy. There are no pictures of nature or of simple emotion in all his writings. He is the poet of town life, and of high life, and of literary life; and seems so much afraid of incurring ridicule by the display of natural feeling or unregulated fancy, that it is difficult not to imagine that he thought such ridicule would have been very well directed.

The best of what we copied from the continental poets, on this desertion of our own great originals, is copied in the lighter pieces of Prior. That tone of polite raillery — that airy, rapid, picturesque narrative, mixed up of wit and *naïveté* — that style, in short, of good conversation, concentrated into flowing and polished verses, was not within the vein of our native poets, and probably never would have been known among us, if we had been left to our own resources. It is lamentable, that this, which alone was worth borrowing, is the only thing which has not been retained. The tales and little apologues of Prior are still the only examples of this style in our language.

With the wits of Queen Anne this foreign school attained the summit of its reputation; and has ever since, we think, been declining, though by slow and almost imperceptible gradations. Thomson was the first writer of any eminence who seceded from it, and made some steps back to the force and animation of our original poetry. Thomson, however, was educated in Scotland, where the new style, we believe, had not yet become familiar; and lived, for a long time, a retired and unambitious life, with very little intercourse with those who gave the tone in literature at the period of his first appearance. Thomson, accordingly, has always been popular with a much wider circle of readers, than either Pope or Addison; and, in spite of considerable vulgarity and signal cumbrousness of diction, has drawn, even from the fastidious, a much deeper and more constant admiration.

Young exhibits, we think, a curious combination, or contrast rather, of the two styles of which we have been speaking. Though incapable either of tenderness or passion, he had a richness and activity of fancy, that belonged rather to the days of James and Elizabeth than to those of George and Anne; — but then, instead of indulging it, as the older writers would have done, in easy and playful inventions, in splendid descriptions, or glowing illustrations, he is led by the restraints and established taste of his age to work it up into strained and fantastical epigrams, or into cold and revolting hyperboles. Instead of letting it flow gracefully on, in an easy and sparkling current, he perpetually forces it out in jets, or makes it stagnate in formal canals; — and thinking it necessary to write like Pope, when the bent of his genius led him rather to copy what was best in Cowley and most fantastic in Shakspeare, he

has produced something which excites wonder instead of admiration, and is felt by every one to be at once ingenious, incongruous, and unnatural.

After Young, there was a plentiful lack of poetical talent, down to a period comparatively recent. Akenside and Gray, indeed, in the interval, discovered a new way of imitating the ancients; — and Collins and Goldsmith produced some small specimens of exquisite and original poetry. At last, Cowper threw off the whole trammels of French criticism and artificial refinement; and, setting at defiance all the imaginary requisites of poetical diction and classical imagery — dignity of style, and politeness of phraseology — ventured to write again with the force and the freedom which formed the great characteristic of the old school of English literature, and had been so unhappily sacrificed, upwards of a century before. Cowper had many faults, and some radical deficiencies; — but this atoned for all. There was something so delightfully refreshing, in seeing natural phrases and natural images again displaying their unforced graces, and waving their unpruned heads in the enchanted gardens of poetry, that no one complained of the taste displayed in the selection; — and Cowper is, and is likely to continue, the most popular of all who have written for the present or the last generation.

Of the poets who have come after him, we cannot, indeed, say that they have attached themselves to the school of Pope and Addison; or that they have even failed to show a much stronger predilection for the native beauties of their great predecessors. Southey, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Miss Baillie, have all of them copied the manner of our older poets; and, along with this indication of good taste, have given great proofs of original genius. The misfortune is, that their copies of those great originals are all liable to the charge of extreme affectation. They do not write as those great poets would have written: they merely mimic their manner, and ape their peculiarities; — and consequently, though they profess to imitate the freest and most careless of all versifiers, their style is more remarkably and offensively artificial than that of any other class of writers. They have mixed in, too, so much of the mawkish tone of pastoral innocence and babyish simplicity, with a sort of pedantic emphasis and ostentatious glitter, that it is difficult not to be disgusted with their perversity, and with the solemn self-complacency, and keen and vindictive jealousy, with which they have put in their claim for public admiration. But we have said enough elsewhere of the faults of these authors; and shall only add at present, that, notwithstanding all these faults, there is a fertility and a force, a warmth of feeling and an exaltation of imagination, about them, which classes them, in our estimation, with a much higher order of poets than the followers of Dryden and Addison; and justifies an anxiety for their fame in all the admirers of Milton and Shakspeare.

Of Scott, or of Campbell, we need scarcely say any thing, with reference to our present object, after the very copious accounts we have given of them on former occasions. The former professes to copy something a good deal older than what we consider as the golden age of English poetry, — and, in reality, has copied every style, and borrowed from every manner that has prevailed, from the times of Chaucer to his own,— illuminating and uniting, if not harmonising them all by a force of colouring, and a rapidity of succession, which is not to be met with in any of his many models. The latter, we think, can scarcely be said to have copied his pathos, or his energy, from any models whatever, either recent or early.

The exquisite harmony of his versification is elaborated, perhaps, from the Castle of Indolence of Thomson, and the serious pieces of Goldsmith; — and it seems to be his misfortune, not to be able to reconcile himself to any thing which he cannot reduce within the limits of this elaborate harmony. This extreme fastidiousness, and the limitation of his efforts to themes of unbroken tenderness, or sublimity, distinguish him from the careless, prolific, and miscellaneous authors of our primitive poetry; — while the enchanting softness of his pathetic passages, and the power and originality of his more sublime conceptions, place him at a still greater distance from the wits, as they truly called themselves, of Charles II. and Queen Anne.

We do not know what other apology to offer for this hasty, and, we fear, tedious sketch of the history of our poetry, but that it appeared to us to be necessary, in order to explain the peculiar merit of that class of writers to which the author before us belongs: — and that it will very greatly shorten what we have still to say on the characteristics of the older dramatists. An opinion prevails very generally on the Continent, and with foreign-bred scholars among ourselves, that our national taste has been corrupted chiefly by our idolatry of Shakspeare; — and that it is our patriotic and traditional admiration of that singular writer, that reconciles us to the monstrous compound of faults and beauties that occur in his performances, and must to all impartial judges appear quite absurd and unnatural. Before entering upon the character of a contemporary dramatist, it was of some importance, therefore, to show, that there was a distinct, original, and independent school of literature in England in the time of Shakspeare, to the general tone of whose productions his works were sufficiently unfavourable; and that it was owing to circumstances in a great measure accidental, that this native school was superseded about the time of the Restoration, and a foreign standard of excellence introduced upon us, not in the drama only, but in every other department of poetry. This new style of composition, however, though adorned and recommended by the splendid talents of many of its followers, was never perfectly naturalised, we think, in this country; and has ceased, in a great measure, to be cultivated by those who have lately aimed with the greatest success at the higher honours of poetry. Our love of Shakspeare, therefore, is not a solitary and unaccountable infatuation, but is merely the natural love which all men bear to those forms of excellence that have been devised with a reference to their peculiar character, temperament, and situation; and will return, and assert its power over their affections, long after authority has lost its reverence, fashions been antiquated, and artificial tastes passed away. In endeavouring, therefore, to bespeak some share of favour for such of his contemporaries as had fallen out of notice during the prevalence of an imported literature, we conceive that we are only enlarging that foundation of native genius on which alone any lasting superstructure can be raised, and invigorating that deep-rooted stock upon which all the perennial blossoms of our literature must still be engrafted.

The notoriety of Shakspeare may seem to make it superfluous to speak of the peculiarities of those old dramatists, of whom he will be admitted to be so worthy a representative. Nor shall we venture to say any thing of the confusion of their plots, the disorders of their chronology, their contempt of the unities, or their imperfect discrimination between the provinces of Tragedy and Comedy. Yet there are characteristics which the lovers of literature may not be displeased to find enumerated, and which may constitute no dishonourable distinction for the whole fraternity,

independent of the splendid talents and incommunicable graces of their great chieftain.

Of the old English dramatists, then, including under this name (besides Shakspeare) Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Jonson, Ford, Shirley, Webster, Dekkar, Field, and Rowley, it may be said, in general, that they are more poetical, and more original in their diction, than the dramatists of any other age or country. Their scenes abound more in varied images, and gratuitous excursions of fancy. Their illustrations, and figures of speech, are more borrowed from rural life, and from the simple occupations, or universal feelings of mankind. They are not confined to a certain range of dignified expressions, nor restricted to a particular assortment of imagery, beyond which it is not lawful to look for embellishments. Let any one compare the prodigious variety, and wide-ranging freedom of Shakspeare, with the narrow round of flames, tempests, treasons, victims, and tyrants, that scantily adorn the sententious pomp of the French drama, and he will not fail to recognise the vast superiority of the former, in the excitement of the imagination, and all the diversities of poetical delight. That very mixture of styles, of which the French critics have so fastidiously complained, forms, when not carried to any height of extravagance, one of the greatest charms of our ancient dramatists. It is equally sweet and natural for personages toiling on the barren heights of life, to be recalled to some vision of pastoral innocence and tranquillity, as for the victims or votaries of ambition to cast a glance of envy and agony on the joys of humble content.

These charming old writers, however, have a still more striking peculiarity in their conduct of the dialogue. On the modern stage, every scene is *visibly* studied and digested beforehand, — and every thing from beginning to end, whether it be description, or argument, or vituperation, is very obviously and ostentatiously set forth in the most advantageous light, and with all the decorations of the most elaborate rhetoric. Now, for mere rhetoric, and fine composition, this is very right; — but, for an imitation of nature, it is not quite so well; and however we may admire the powers of the artist, we are not very likely to be moved with any very lively sympathy in the emotions of those very rhetorical interlocutors. When we come to any important part of the play, on the Continental or modern stage, we are sure to have a most complete, formal, and exhausting discussion of it in long flourishing orations, — argument after argument propounded and answered with infinite ingenuity, and topic after topic brought forward in well-digested method, without any deviation that the most industrious and practised pleader would not approve of, — till nothing more remains to be said, and a new scene introduces us to a new set of gladiators, as expert and persevering as the former. It is exactly the same when a story is to be told, — a tyrant to be bullied, — or a princess to be wooed. On the old English stage, however, the proceedings were by no means so regular. There the discussions always appear to be casual, and the argument quite artless and disorderly. The persons of the drama are made to speak like men and women who meet without preparation in real life. Their reasonings are perpetually broken by passion, or left imperfect for want of skill. They wander from the point in hand, in the most unbusinesslike manner in the world; — and after hitting upon a topic that would afford a judicious playwright room for a magnificent see-saw of pompous declamation, they have always the awkwardness to let it slip, as if perfectly unconscious of its value, and uniformly leave the scene without exhausting the controversy, or

stating half the plausible things for themselves that any ordinary advisers might have suggested after a few weeks' reflection. As specimens of eloquent argumentation, we must admit the signal inferiority of our native favourites; but as true copies of nature, — as vehicles of passion, and representations of character, we confess we are tempted to give them the preference. When a dramatist brings his chief characters on the stage, we readily admit that he must give them something to say, — and that this something must be interesting and characteristic; — but he should recollect also, that they are supposed to come there without having anticipated all they were to hear, or meditated on all they were to deliver; and that it cannot be characteristic, therefore, because it must be glaringly unnatural, that they should proceed regularly through every possible view of the subject, and exhaust in set order the whole magazine of reflections that can be brought to bear upon their situation.

It would not be fair, however, to leave this view of the matter, without observing, that this unsteadiness and irregularity of dialogue, which gives such an air of nature to our older plays, and keeps the curiosity and attention so perpetually awake, is very frequently carried to a most blamable excess; and that, independent of their passion for verbal quibbles, there is an inequality and capricious uncertainty in the taste and judgment of these good old writers, which excites at once our amazement and our compassion. If it be true, that no other man has ever written so finely as Shakspeare has done in his happier passages, it is no less true, that there is not a scribbler now alive who could possibly write worse than he has sometimes written, — who could, on occasion, devise more contemptible ideas, or misplace them so abominably, by the side of such incomparable excellence. That there were no critics, and no critical readers in those days, appears to us but an imperfect solution of the difficulty. He who could write so admirably, must have been a critic to himself. Children may play with the most precious gems, and the most worthless pebbles, without being aware of any difference in their value; but the very powers which are necessary to the production of intellectual excellence, must enable the possessor to recognise it as excellence; and he who knows when he succeeds, can scarcely be unconscious of his failures. Unaccountable, however, as it is, the fact is certain, that almost all the dramatic writers of this age appear to be alternately inspired and bereft of understanding; and pass, apparently without being conscious of the change, from the most beautiful displays of genius to the most melancholy exemplifications of stupidity.

There is only one other peculiarity which we shall notice in these ancient dramas; and that is, the singular, though very beautiful, style in which the greater part of them are composed, — a style which we think must have been felt as peculiar by all who peruse them, though it is by no means easy to describe in what its peculiarity consists. It is not, for the most part, a lofty or sonorous style, — nor is it finical or affected, — or strained, quaint, or pedantic, — but it is, at the same time, a style full of turn and contrivance, — with some little degree of constraint and involution, — very often characterised by a studied briefness and simplicity of diction, yet relieved by a certain indirect and figurative cast of expression, — and almost always coloured with a modest tinge of ingenuity, and fashioned, rather too visibly, upon a particular model of elegance and purity. In scenes of powerful passion, this sort of artificial prettiness is commonly shaken off; and, in Shakspeare, it disappears under all his forms of animation: but it sticks closer to most of his con-

temporaries. In Massinger (who has no passion), it is almost always discernible; and, in the author before us, it gives a peculiar tone to almost all the estimable parts of his productions.

It would be useless, and worse than useless, to give our readers an abstract of the fable and management of each of the nine plays contained in the volumes before us. A very few brief remarks upon their general character, will form a sufficient introduction to the extracts, by which we propose to let our readers judge for themselves of the merits of their execution. The comic parts are all utterly bad. With none of the richness of Shakspeare's humour, the extravagant merriment of Beaumont and Fletcher, or the strong colouring of Ben Jonson, they are as heavy and indecent as Massinger, and not more witty, though a little more varied, than the buffooneries of Wycherly or Dryden. Fortunately, however, the author's merry vein is not displayed in very many parts of his performances. His plots are not very cunningly digested; nor developed, for the most part, by a train of very probable incidents. His characters are drawn rather with occasional felicity, than with general sagacity and judgment. Like those of Massinger, they are very apt to startle the reader with sudden and unexpected transformations, and to turn out, in the latter half of the play, very differently from what they promised to do in the beginning. This kind of surprise has been represented by some as a master-stroke of art in the author, and a great merit in the performance. We have no doubt at all, however, that it arises merely from the writer's carelessness, or change of purpose; and have never failed to feel it a great blemish in every serious piece where it occurs.

The author has not much of the oratorical stateliness and imposing flow of Massinger; nor a great deal of the smooth and flexible diction, the wandering fancy, and romantic sweetness of Beaumont and Fletcher; and yet he comes nearer to these qualities than to any of the distinguishing characteristics of Jonson or Shakspeare. He excels most in representing the pride and gallantry and high-toned honour of youth, and the enchanting softness or the mild and graceful magnanimity of female character. There is a certain melancholy air about his most striking representations; and, in the tender and afflicting pathetic, he appears to us occasionally to be second only to him who has never yet had an equal. The greater part of every play, however, is bad; and there is not one which does not contain faults sufficient to justify the derision of those who are incapable even of comprehending its contrasted beauties.

There is a great treasure of poetry, we think, still to be brought to light in the neglected writers of the age to which this author belongs; and poetry of a kind which, if purified and improved, as the happier specimens show that it is capable of being, would be far more delightful to the generality of English readers than any other species of poetry.

CHANGES IN THE CHARACTER OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE TO THE PRESENT TIMES.*

By far the most considerable change which has taken place in the world of letters in our days, is that by which the wits of Queen Anne's time have been gradually brought down from the supremacy which they had enjoyed, without competition, for the best part of a century. When we were at our studies, some twenty-five years ago, we can perfectly remember that every young man was set to read Pope, Swift, and Addison, as regularly as Virgil, Cicero, and Horace. All who had any tincture of letters were familiar with their writings and their history; allusions to them abounded in all popular discourses and all ambitious conversation; and they and their contemporaries were universally acknowledged as our great models of excellence, and placed without challenge at the head of our national literature. New books, even when allowed to have merit, were never thought of as fit to be placed in the same class, but were generally read and forgotten, and passed away like the transitory meteors of a lower sky; while *they* remained in their brightness, and were supposed to shine with a fixed and unalterable glory.

All this, however, we take it, is now pretty well altered; and in so far as persons of our antiquity can judge of the training and habits of the rising generation, those celebrated writers no longer form the manual of our studious youth, or enter necessarily into the institution of a liberal education. Their names, indeed, are still familiar to our ears; but their writings no longer solicit our habitual notice, and their subjects begin already to fade from our recollection. Their high privileges and proud distinctions, at any rate, have evidently passed into other hands. It is no longer to them that the ambitious look up with envy, or the humble with admiration; nor is it in their pages that the pretenders to wit and eloquence now search for allusions that are sure to captivate, and illustrations that cannot be mistaken. In this decay of their reputation they have few advocates, and no imitators: and from a comparison of many observations, it seems to be clearly ascertained, that they are declined considerably from "the high meridian of their glory," and may fairly be apprehended to be "hastening to their setting." Neither is it time alone that has wrought this obscuration: for the fame of Shakspeare still shines in undecaying brightness; and that of Bacon has been steadily advancing, and gathering new honours, during the whole period which has witnessed the rise and decline of his less vigorous successors.

There are but two possible solutions for phenomena of this sort. Our taste has either degenerated — or its old models have been fairly surpassed; and we have ceased to admire the writers of the last century, only because they are too good for us — or because they are not good enough. Now, we confess we are no believers in the absolute and permanent corruption of national taste; on the contrary, we think that it is, of all faculties, that which is most sure to advance and improve with time and experience; and that, with the exception of those great physical or political disasters which have given a check to civilisation itself, there

* The Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin: containing additional Letters, Tracts, and Poems, not hitherto published: with Notes, and a Life of the Author, by Walter Scott, Esq.—Vol. xxvii. p. 1. September, 1816.

has always been a sensible progress in this particular; and that the general taste of every successive generation is better than that of its predecessors. There are little capricious fluctuations, no doubt, and fits of foolish admiration or fastidiousness which cannot be so easily accounted for; but the great movements are all progressive: and though the progress consists at one time in withholding toleration from gross faults, and at another in giving their high prerogative to great beauties, this alternation has no tendency to obstruct the general advance; but, on the contrary, is the best and the safest course in which it can be conducted.

We are of opinion, then, that the writers who adorned the beginning of the last century have been eclipsed by those of our own time; and that they have no chance of ever regaining the supremacy in which they have thus been supplanted. There is not, however, in our judgment, any thing very stupendous in this triumph of our contemporaries; and the greater wonder with us is, that it was so long delayed, and left for them to achieve. For the truth is, that the writers of the former age had not a great deal more than their judgment and industry to stand on, and were always much more remarkable for the fewness of their faults than the greatness of their beauties. Their laurels were won much more by good conduct and discipline, than by enterprising boldness or native force; — nor can it be regarded as any very great merit in those who had so little of the inspiration of genius, to have steered clear of the dangers to which that inspiration is liable. Speaking generally of that generation of authors, it may be said, that, as poets, they had no force or greatness of fancy — no pathos, and no enthusiasm; — and, as philosophers, no comprehensiveness, depth, or originality. They are sagacious, no doubt, neat, clear, and reasonable; but for the most part cold, timid, and superficial. They never meddle with the great scenes of nature, or the great passions of man; but content themselves with just and sarcastic representations of city life, and of the paltry passions and meaner vices that are bred in that lower element. Their chief care is to avoid being ridiculous in the eyes of the witty, and above all to eschew the ridicule of excessive sensibility or enthusiasm — to be witty and rational themselves with a good grace, and to give their countenance to no wisdom, and no morality, which passes the standards that are current in good company. — Their inspiration, accordingly, is little more than a sprightly sort of good sense; and they have scarcely any invention but what is subservient to the purposes of derision and satire. Little gleams of pleasantry, and sparkles of wit, glitter through their compositions; but no glow of feeling — no blaze of imagination — no flashes of genius, ever irradiate their substance. They never pass beyond "the visible diurnal sphere," or deal in any thing that can either lift us above our vulgar nature, or ennoble its reality. With these accomplishments, they may pass well enough for sensible and polite writers, — but scarcely for men of genius; and it is certainly far more surprising, that persons of this description should have maintained themselves, for near a century, at the head of the literature of a country that had previously produced a Shakspeare, a Bacon, and a Taylor, than that, towards the end of that long period, doubts should have arisen as to the legitimacy of the title by which they laid claim to that high station. Both parts of the phenomenon, however, we dare say, had causes which better expounders might explain to the satisfaction of all the world. We see them but imperfectly, and have room only for an imperfect sketch of what we see.

Our first literature consisted of saintly legends, and romances of chi-

valry, — though Chaucer gave it a more national and popular character by his original descriptions of external nature, and the familiarity and gaiety of his social humour. In the time of Elizabeth, it received a copious infusion of classical images and ideas; but it was still intrinsically romantic — serious — and even somewhat lofty and enthusiastic. Authors were then so few in number, that they were looked upon with a sort of veneration, and considered as a kind of inspired persons; — at least they were not yet so numerous, as to be obliged to abuse each other, in order to obtain a share of distinction for themselves; — and they neither affected a tone of derision in their writings, nor wrote in fear of derision from others. They were filled with their subjects, and dealt with them fearlessly in their own way; and the stamp of originality, force, and freedom, is consequently upon almost all their productions. In the reign of James I., our literature, with some few exceptions, touching rather the form than the substance of its merits, appears to us to have reached the greatest perfection to which it has yet attained; though it would probably have advanced still farther in the succeeding reign, had not the great national dissensions which then arose, turned the talent and energy of the people into other channels — first to the assertion of their civil rights, and afterwards to the discussion of their religious interests. The graces of literature suffered, of course, in those fierce contentions; and a deeper shade of austerity was thrown upon the intellectual chronicler of the nation. Her genius, however, though less captivating and adorned than in the happier days which preceded, was still active, fruitful, and commanding; and the period of the civil wars, besides the mighty minds that guided the public councils, and were absorbed in public cares, produced the giant powers of Taylor, and Hobbes, and Barrow — the muse of Milton — the learning of Coke — and the ingenuity of Cowley.

The Restoration introduced a French court — under circumstances more favourable for the effectual exercise of court influence than ever before existed in England: but this of itself would not have been sufficient to account for the sudden change in our literature which ensued. It was seconded by causes of a more general operation. The Restoration was undoubtedly a popular act; — and, indefensible as the conduct of the army and the civil leaders was on that occasion, there can be no question that the severities of Cromwell, and the extravagance of the sectaries, had made republican professions hateful, and religious ardour ridiculous, in the eyes of the people at large. All the eminent writers of the preceding period, however, had inclined to the party that was now overthrown; and their writings had not merely been accommodated to the character of the government under which they were produced, but were deeply imbued with its obnoxious principles, as those of their respective authors. When the restraints of authority were taken off, therefore, and it became profitable, as well as popular, to discredit the fallen party, it was natural that the leading authors should affect a style of levity and derision, as most opposite to that of their opponents, and best calculated for the purposes they had in view. The nation, too, was now for the first time essentially divided in point of character and principle, and a much greater proportion were capable both of writing in support of their own notions, and of being influenced by what was written. Add to all this, that there were real and serious defects in the style and manner of the former generation; and that the grace, and brevity, and vivacity of that gayer manner which was now introduced from France, were not only good and captivating in themselves, but had then all the charms of

novelty and of contrast; and it will not be difficult to understand how it came to supplant that which had been established of old in the country, —and that so suddenly, that the same generation, among whom Milton had been formed to the severe sanctity of wisdom, and the noble independence of genius, lavished its loudest applauses on the obscenity and servility of such writers as Rochester and Wycherly.

This change, however, like all sudden changes, was too fierce and violent to be long maintained at the same pitch; and when the wits and profligates of King Charles had sufficiently insulted the seriousness and virtue of their predecessors, there would probably have been a revulsion towards the accustomed taste of the nation, had not the party of the innovators been reinforced by champions of more temperance and judgment. The result seemed at one time suspended on the will of Dryden — in whose individual person the genius of the English and of the French school of literature may be said to have maintained a protracted struggle. But the evil principle prevailed. Carried by the original bent of his genius, and his familiarity with our older models to the cultivation of our native style, to which he might have imparted more steadiness and correctness — for in force and in sweetness it was already matchless — he was unluckily seduced by the attractions of fashion, and the dazzling of the dear wit and gay rhetoric in which it delighted, to lend his powerful aid to the new corruptions and refinements, and to prostitute his great gifts to the purposes of party rage or licentious ribaldry.

The sobriety of the succeeding reigns allayed this fever of profanity; but no genius arose sufficiently powerful to break the spell that still withheld us from the use of our own peculiar gifts and faculties. On the contrary, it was the unfortunate ambition of the next generation of authors to improve and perfect the new style, rather than to return to the old one; — and it cannot be denied that they did improve it. They corrected its gross indecency — increased its precision and correctness — made its pleasantry and sarcasm more polished and elegant — and spread through the whole of its irony, its narration, and its reflection, a tone of clear and condensed good sense, which recommended itself to all who had, and all who had not, any relish for higher beauties. This is the praise of Queen Anne's wits, — and to this praise they are justly entitled. This was left for them to do, —and they did it well. They were invited to it by the circumstances of their situation, and do not seem to have been possessed of any such bold or vigorous spirit as either to neglect or to outgo the invitation. Coming into life immediately after the consummation of a bloodless revolution, effected much more by the cool sense than the angry passions of the nation, they seem to have felt that they were born in an age of reason, rather than of fancy; and that men's minds, though considerably divided and unsettled upon many points, were in a much better temper to relish judicious argument and cutting satire, than the glow of enthusiastic passion, or the richness of a luxuriant imagination. To these accordingly they made no pretensions; but, writing with infinite good sense, and great grace and vivacity, and, above all, writing for the first time in a tone that was peculiar to the upper ranks of society, and upon subjects that were almost exclusively interesting to them, they naturally figured, at least while the manner was new, as the most accomplished, fashionable, and perfect writers which the world had ever seen; and made the wild, luxuriant, and humble sweetness of our earlier authors appear rude and untutored in the comparison. Men grew ashamed of admiring, and afraid of imitating, writers of so little skill and smartness; and the opinion

became general, not only that their faults were intolerable, but that even their beauties were puerile and barbarous, and unworthy the serious regard of a polite and distinguishing age.

These, and similar considerations, will go far to account for the celebrity which those authors acquired in their day; but it is not quite so easy to explain how they should have so long retained their ascendant. One cause undoubtedly was, the real excellence of their productions, in the style which they had adopted. It was hopeless to think of surpassing them in that style; and, recommended as it was, by the felicity of their execution, it required some courage to depart from it and to recur to another, which seemed to have been so lately abandoned for its sake. The age which succeeded, too, was not the age of courage or adventure. There never was, on the whole, a quieter time than the reigns of the two first Georges, and the greater part of that which ensued. There were two little provincial rebellions indeed, and a fair proportion of foreign war; but there was nothing to stir the minds of the people at large, to rouse their passions, or excite their imaginations — nothing like the agitations of the Reformation in the 16th century, or of the civil wars in the 17th. They went on, accordingly, minding their old business, and reading their old books, with great patience and stupidity: and certainly there never was so remarkable a dearth of original talent — so long an interruption of native genius — as during about sixty years in the middle of the last century. The dramatic art was dead fifty years before, — and poetry seemed verging to a similar extinction. The few sparks that appeared, however, showed that the old fire was burnt out, and that the altar must hereafter be heaped with fuel of another quality. Gray, with the talents, rather of a critic than a poet — with learning, fastidiousness, and scrupulous delicacy of taste, instead of fire, tenderness, or invention — began and ended a small school, which we could scarcely have wished to become permanent — admirable in many respects as some of its productions are — being far too elaborate and artificial, either for grace or for fluency, and fitter to excite the admiration of scholars, than the delight of ordinary men. However, they had the merit of not being in any degree French, and of restoring to our poetry the dignity of seriousness, and the tone at least of force and energy. The Whartons, both as critics and as poets, were of considerable service in discrediting the high pretensions of the former race, and in bringing back to public notice the great stores and treasures of poetry which lay hid in the records of our ancient literature. Akenside attempted a sort of classical and philosophical rapture, which no elegance of language could easily have rendered popular, but which had merits of no vulgar order for those who could study it. Goldsmith wrote with perfect elegance and beauty, in a style of mellow tenderness and elaborate simplicity. He had the harmony of Pope without his quaintness, and his selectness of diction without his coldness and eternal vivacity. And, last of all, came Cowper, with a style of complete originality, — and, for the first time, made it apparent to readers of all descriptions, that Pope and Addison were no longer to be the models of English poetry.

In philosophy and prose writing in general, the case was nearly parallel. The name of Hume is by far the most considerable which occurs in the period to which we alluded. But though his thinking was English, his style is entirely French; and being naturally of a cold fancy, there is nothing of that eloquence or richness about him, which characterises the writings of Taylor, and Hooker, and Bacon — and continues, with less

weight of matter, to please in those of Cowley and Clarendon. Warburton had great powers, and wrote with more force and freedom than the wits to whom he succeeded; but his faculties were perverted by a paltry love of paradox, and rendered useless to mankind by an unlucky choice of subjects, and the arrogance and dogmatism of his temper. Adam Smith was nearly the first who made deeper reasonings, and more exact knowledge popular among us; and Junius and Johnson the first who again familiarised us with more glowing and sonorous diction, and made us feel the tameness and poorness of the serious style of Addison and Swift.

This brings us down almost to the present times — in which the revolution in our literature has been accelerated and confirmed by the concurrence of many causes. The agitations of the French revolution, and the discussions as well as the hopes and terrors to which it gave occasion — the genius of Edmund Burke, and some others of his country — the impression of the new literature of Germany, evidently the original of our lake-school of poetry, and of many innovations in our drama — the rise or revival of a general spirit of methodism in the lower orders — and the vast extent of our political and commercial relations, which have not only familiarised all ranks of people with distant countries and great undertakings, but have brought knowledge and enterprise home, not merely to the imagination, but to the actual experience of almost every individual. All these, and several other circumstances, have so far improved or excited the character of our nation, as to have created an effectual demand for more profound speculation, and more serious emotion, than was dealt in by the writers of the former century, and which, if it has not yet produced a corresponding supply in all branches, has at least had the effect of decrying the commodities that were previously in vogue, as unsuited to the altered condition of the times.

Of those ingenious writers, whose characteristic certainly was not vigour, any more than tenderness or fancy, Swift was indisputably the most vigorous — and perhaps the least tender or fanciful. The greater part of his works being occupied with politics and personalities that have long since lost all interest, can now attract but little attention, except as memorials of the manner in which politics and personalities were then conducted. In other parts, however, there is a vein of peculiar humour and strong satire, which will always be agreeable — and a sort of heartiness of abuse and contempt of mankind, which produces a greater sympathy and animation in the reader than the more elaborate sarcasms that have since come into fashion. Altogether his merits appear to be more *unique* and inimitable than those of any of his contemporaries.

COMPARISON BETWEEN ENGLISH AND FRENCH POETRY.*

There is nothing in which the opinions of the French and English differ so irreconcilably as in Poetry, — and therefore, perhaps, the critics of the one nation ought not to pass judgment on the poets of the

* 1. Méditations Poétiques. Par Alphonse de la Martine. 2. Trois Messeniennes. Elégies sur les Malheurs de la France. Deux Messeniennes sur la Vie et la Mort de Jeanne d'Arc. Par Casimir de la Vigne. 3. Chansons, &c. Par J. B. de Béranger.—Vol. xxxvii. p. 407. November, 1822.

other. We can exchange our cottons for their wines — our cut-steel for their *or moulu* — our blankets for their cambrics, and find ground for mutual satisfaction in the bargain; — but the *prices current of Poetry* are so outrageously different in the two countries, that we would not part with a scene of Shakspeare for the whole body of their dramatists; — nor would they give up a canto of Voltaire — Henriade, or Pucelle either — for the whole of our Spenser, and Milton into the bargain.

Now, it will not do to account for this contradiction of sentiment by the mere effect of national partiality, or the habit of considering the same substantial excellences as exclusively connected with certain external accompaniments; — for both nations admit the merit of *other* foreign competitors. There is, in truth, a radical difference in the excellences at which they respectively aim — and each admires its own for qualities which the other disdains. There are some points of contact undoubtedly — but not many. The admirers of our Pope, in his satirical and didactic parts at least, cannot but admire their Boileau; and those who are captivated with the tragedy of Addison, must admit, we should think, his inferiority to Racine. But we really cannot carry the parallel any farther. What is most poetical in our poetry, has no counterpart in theirs, — nor have we anything at all akin to what they chiefly boast of and value in their favourites.

If we were called upon to state, in a few words, the grand distinction of the two schools, we should probably say, that our poetry derives its materials chiefly from nature, and theirs from art — that our images are borrowed for the most part from the country, and theirs from the town — that we deal fearlessly with the primitive and universal passions of our kind, and they almost exclusively with the pretensions and prejudices of persons of rank and condition — that their great dread is to be ignoble, and ours to be insipid — their triumph to surmount difficulties, and ours to give emotion.

The grand difference is the deeper sympathy we have with Nature — and the greater veneration they pay to Art; — and this requires a word of explanation — for all civilisation, it may be said, is art; and no nation has pursued it so far, or carried into so many departments, as the English. And this in some sense is true. But the leading distinction we take to be this: the English employ art to *improve* and imitate nature — the French to *correct* and supersede her. The one approach her with veneration, as humble ministrants to her energies, or dutiful observers of her course; the other with contempt, and as pitying her rudeness, or distrustful of her power. This is most conspicuous, perhaps, in the way in which they respectively seek to embellish their country residences. An English park is a reverend and feeling imitation of what is most beautiful in the landscapes which Nature herself has contrived in similar situations — and is effected, in truth, rather by removing the accidental obstructions that are opposed to her development, than by subjecting her to any degree of force or constraint — by giving the trees room to assume their natural proportions — letting the grass be equally cropped by the flocks, and opening up the glades and distances in their natural gradations. A French park, on the other hand, is throughout, and in every part, an ostentatious and presumptuous attempt to supersede and expel Nature altogether, and to raise a triumph on her complete subjugation — the trees planted in square masses and pruned into regular alleys,— the banks notched into terraces — the streams built into canals, or forced up into

jets — and the shrubs paraded in rows of painted boxes! Among the middling and lower orders of the people, there is the same remarkable want of sympathy with nature, or respect for her. They cultivate their fields, but never adorn them — they plant, or spare, no trees for beauty — but for fuel only, or carpentry; and around their cottages you see no more blossoms and verdure without, than cleanliness or neatness within.

They have treated the human form very much as they have the landscape. It is to France we owe the horrible invention, or at least the general introduction, of such abominations as wigs, hair-powder, coats, waistcoats, and breeches, tight stays, hooped petticoats, and high heeled shoes — of all, in short, that makes us laugh or shudder at the pictures of our progenitors in the last century, and that still continues to give such meanness and deformity, at least to our male figures, as to render them unfit for sculpture, and perilous even for painting. Compared with these characteristic French inventions, the ancient dress of all the European nations was both graceful and expressive — the Celtic and Sarmatian — the Spanish, the Polish — the Venetian — the Russian, the Norwegian. It was either ample and flowing, to give dignity and grace to the figure; or tight and succinct, to express its form and favour its activity. The French, by which it has been unluckily superseded, has no character at all, but that of heaviness, meanness, and constraint. The same antipathy to nature led them to repress and overwhelm her with their helps and ornaments, almost from the first moment of birth. Infants were manacled in swaddling clothes, and scarcely allowed to walk till they were taught to dance. The lectures of Rousseau, and their recent passion for having every thing '*à la Grècque*,' have at last produced some relenting; but we can ourselves remember, when every well-born male of seven years old had a tail fastened to the hinder part of its head, and a toupet on its front, with rows of stiff curls *en âiles de pigeon* on each side,— while every female form of the same age was compressed in whalebone stays and iron busks, to the danger of suffocation; and all these little wretches, with the manners, language, and gestures of persons of sixty, paid set compliments to the company, in the second and fourth positions!

It was, of course, impossible that this contempt for nature should not appear in their poetry, and their delineations of passion and character. Accordingly, their love is not love but gallantry — their heroism not much better than ostentation — and the chief concern of their poetical personages, in all their agitations, is rather to maintain their consideration among people of their own condition, than to express those emotions which level all conditions, and overwhelm all vanities in the tide of impetuous feeling.

These considerations go far to explain why French poetry should be different from ours — and, we must add, inferior to it — and that from causes that belong to the general character and habits of the nation. We must be permitted to say farther, that they appear, in this as in every thing else, to have less force of Imagination, and a less elevated Taste, than most other polished nations — incredible as these imputations must appear in their ears.

That the French lay claim to a greater portion of imagination than has been bestowed on any other people, may be learned from the gentle accusations they prefer against themselves in certain emergencies; for, in truth, nothing ever goes amiss with them but by an *excess* of this quality When they draw too hasty conclusions in argument, or venture impru-

dently in battle — when they linger under despotism out of love to their Sovereign, or overshoot the boundaries of human liberty out of philanthropy — when they exterminate a rival sect, or deny the existence of a God — when, in a single moment, they become all or any thing to excess, they lay it to the account of that uncontrollable vivacity which hurries them away. '*Nous autres François nous avons des têtes si vives! nous avons tant d'imagination!*' — that they cannot submit to the rule and compass, like the dull races around them. In short, the only defect in their character is too lavish a proportion of the highest faculty with which creative genius is endowed! The regularity with which *we* conduct the common concerns of life; the guardian *forms* with which we surround the dearest of our public blessings, are, in their opinion, but so many proofs that the English have no imagination; though in their most indulgent humour, they allow we are good *machines* ourselves, and have produced some that are not altogether contemptible. This, however, is of less consequence; but it is quite necessary to observe, that imagination may be predominant in two different cases. The one is when it really is very abundant; the other, when its antagonist faculty is so weak as to be easily subdued. Now, the antagonist faculty of imagination is judgment, or the vulgar thing called common sense. A very little imagination, therefore, joined to a very little common sense, may, in many respects, produce the same derangement of balance as a large portion of imagination with a large portion of common sense; and we suspect it would not be difficult to refer to instances in which imagination seems to act too great a part in French affairs, only because reason acts too little.

The language of common life abounds in small metaphors, suited to its small occasions; and *we* should think it ridiculous either to increase their number, or to exchange them for loftier tropes. Yet, one great exercise of French imagination is in this department. The story which Sterne relates of his French barber, who proposed *immersing his periwig in the ocean*, to show that damp could not uncurl it, is not a bad specimen of such grandiloquism. Dipping it in a pail of water would have been more natural, but there would have been no fancy in that — and this, it seems, was a case for fancy! even in sober reasoning, the French are too apt to take a figure of speech for an argument; to assume similitude upon too slight grounds, and then to confound this similitude with identity. Even in science, the common language is more figurative in France than in England; and less vigour, both of thought and of expression, is by them deemed necessary in those very branches the perfection of which depends upon the accuracy of language. Neither is this precipitancy confined to their thoughts alone; it influences their most serious actions; and they are always ready to enter into any project which promises fair to fancy without reflecting upon its real probability or advantages. As a Frenchman once said, "C'est toujours *l'impossible* qu'il faut demander au Français — et il l'exécutera." They treat the great affairs of life, in short, with levity, the smaller concerns with importance. On the other hand, there are cases in which a little more imagination would be acceptable; and the most remarkable of these perhaps is the subject of our present consideration, Poetry. Of all the nations of the globe, ancient and modern, Hebrews, Hindoos, Greeks, Romans, Scandinavians, Italians, Spaniards, Germans, English, there is not one that, having any poetry at all, does not surpass the French in strength, originality, sublimity, invention — in a word, in all the qualities which are dependent upon reach and grandeur of imagination. But, if this faculty were as abundant among them as

they pretend, should we not find it bursting out in poetry, rather than in things which are essentially under the dominion of sound judgment and common sense; in epic poems rather than in declarations of the rights of man; in dithyrambic odes, rather than in election laws; among dramatic authors rather than deliberative assemblies? In France, however, the place of these faculties seems long to have been confounded, and this dislocation of their imagination is produced as a proof of its actual strength and abundance! In what other country would a national academy propose the institution of *Jury Trial* as the subject of a *prize poem* in the nineteenth century?

Upon the delicate chapter of Taste we have but little to say, after what we have already ventured to remark as to their contempt for nature, and the way in which they have treated the landscape and the *costumi* of their country. In sculpture, and in music, their taste has always been pitiable; and though their country has given birth to some admirable painters, they have always been formed and generally resided abroad—while, for nearly a century, the race appears to have been extinct. To make amends, however, we do not mean to deny, that they have a good taste in millinery, in jewellery, in ornamental furniture, in fireworks, processions, dances, ceremonies, and grand entertainments—that is to say, in all things that belong to parade, rather than passion, or to the gratification of vanity, rather than the suggestion of lofty emotion. In all the nobler arts, we deny that their taste is respectable.

The last characteristic of French poetry we shall mention is that which it derives from the defects of the language: and here we do not allude so much to its want of sonorousness or melody, as to the poorness of its idiom, and the unpoetical character of the metaphors which enter into its structure. Languages, though they at last re-act upon the intellects of those who use them, were originally formed by men, and always bear the impress of the spirit from which they proceeded. Among an ardent and imaginative people, the commonest expressions savour of passion and of fancy, and the idiom itself breathes of poetry. In a colder and more courtly tribe, it takes a tinge of precision and politeness, and grows up into an apt instrument for flattery or facetiousness. It was the lot of French poetry, from the beginning, to be under the patronage of courtiers. The madrigals and ballads in which the Muse there made her essay, were composed for princesses, and sung in the courts of kings. From the time of Louis XII. there are the clearest traces of this; and the fashion was continued through the whole reign of Louis XIV. The judge whose opinion Boileau and Racine courted the most, was the monarch; and, next to him, the princes of the blood; and then, in succession, the ducs et pairs de France, and the gentlemen of his court and household. Such was *their* public; and the language which was not current there, could not be used in poetry! But is it not better that a thousand exuberances, nay, that some daring improprieties should occasionally disfigure speech, than that passion should be deprived of half its eloquence, or that a language should be prescribed to the soul by cold academies and heartless courts? Our neighbours, however, judge so very differently, that there are few things of which they are more vain than the *courtliness* of their poetical diction. Whenever a stranger happens not to feel as much rapture as they express for their poets, he is told that a foreigner cannot feel the beauties and the *finesses* of the French language. Now, nothing, we think, can be so certain, as that the poetry which consists chiefly in the beauties and *finesses* of language must be

the lowest of all poetry—and the language of which the beauties are the most difficult to discover, the most unpoetical of languages. The essence of poetry consists in sentiment, passion, imagery, and the universal feelings which are dependent upon no turns of expression; and which, in whatever garb they may be disguised, are instantly recognised as the *disjecta membra* of the poet. How comes it, we would ask, that Homer is admired by all nations? Are there no *finesses* in the language of that poetical patriarch which a stranger cannot feel? Have Sophocles, Eschylus, Virgil, Horace, none of these?—or the inspired strains of the Hebrews, although they had no academy? Certainly it appears to us, that a residence of a year or two in any country, with a good will to learn its dialect, must do more to let us into these mysteries, than twice the time employed among dead authors. Neither do we conceive the French language to be so much more atticised than that of Athens, that its beauties and *finesses* are inscrutable to all whose first breath was not drawn in the atmosphere of Paris.

Upon those principles relating to imagination, taste, and language, the heartlessness of French poetry, and its want of originality, sublimity, invention, force, are easily explained. Twenty-seven millions of men could not be found in Europe, who, in proportion to the antiquity and the degree of their civilisation, have produced so small a number of poets,—and whose poets have received so small a share of inspiration. Before Corneille, very few had given proof of strong and true genius, or have left any durable and still admired monuments of their art: while, long before that period, we had poets in Britain, one of whom never was equalled, and many have not yet been excelled.

It is owing to these circumstances, we believe, and is a new proof of the truth with which they are alleged, that great poetical genius has indicated itself both among the *uneducated* and among the *very young*, much more frequently in England than in the neighbouring country. The inspiration with us is too strong to be repressed by the want of due utterance—or, rather, the utterance which is prompted from such a source has always commanded *our* admiration. *There*, it would seem, that, to please academies, one must have studied in academies—and that no knowledge of the heart could atone for the want of familiarity with the tone of good company. They have, indeed, one, *La Grand Chancel*, who is famous for having written some trash called a comedy, at nine years of age—and one carpenter, *Adam Billaut*, who wrote vulgar verses, with some applause, in the time of Louis XIV. But what are these to our instances of Cowley, Pope, Chatterton, and Kirke White for precocity—or SHAKSPEARE himself, Burns, Hogg, or Bloomfield, for genius, in the humblest condition? The progress of refinement with us has been so far from either repressing the feelings of the peasant, or making the polite fastidious, that it has produced just the opposite effects—as, in truth, it ought always to do.

The remarks which we have made apply to the French poetry of the two last centuries—to the only poetry, in short, which the French themselves now read, or call upon others to admire. Yet it would be unjust not to acknowledge that it was to them that all Europe was indebted for its first poetical impulse—and that the *romantic* literature which distinguishes the genius of modern Europe from that of classical antiquity, originated with the *Trouveurs* and *Conteurs*—the *Jongleurs* and *Menestrels* of Provence.

We cannot stop now to give any history of this gay science—which proceeded with such brilliant success, that a regular academy was

established for its cultivation in Toulouse before the end of the 12th century, and its spirit transmitted, almost at the same time, into all the kingdoms of Europe. Sarmiento * has indeed attempted to show, that this new kind of poetry, having been introduced into Spain by the Moors, first passed through Catalonia into Provence, where, meeting no doubt with singular success, it soon spread over all France, and afterwards *returned* by way of Toulouse to Barcelona — and thence to Andalusia, where it had begun, We do not think, however, that there is any evidence of this Moorish origin, sufficient to impeach the originality of the Provençal poets; and though it is not less true than remarkable, that, so early as the 12th century, the *Romançero General*, and other collections, exhibit an incredible quantity of Spanish poems of the new school, yet the very name of *La Gaia Ciencia*, by which it is there distinguished, seems sufficiently to attest its origin; and it is recorded by Sarmiento himself, that the King of Arragon, in the 14th century, procured from the King of France two professors of poetry from Toulouse, who were settled at Barcelona, for the better encouragement of the poetical art, at that time considered of such national importance.

It would be useless, for any purpose we have now in view, to trace the progress or decline, whichever it may be called, of French poetry, from the age of the Troubadours down to that of Corneille and Racine, with whom it is supposed to have attained its perfection. It seems to have been in the reign of Louis XII., when Octavien de St. Gelais translated the Odyssey and the Epistles of Ovid, that it took a decided turn towards classical themes and models; and in the time of Henry II., Jodelle obtained such honour for his tragedies in the taste of the ancients, that he was hailed as a second Æschylus, and presented, in the true style of academic pedantry, with *a goat* and garlands! The reign of Henri IV. seems to have been the most prolific of French poetry. It was then that Du Bartas published his poem on the Creation, entitled "La Première Semaine," which, it is said, went through thirty editions in six years, — though no one, we suppose, has had courage to read it through for the last century. Then also flourished the most fertile of all the French poets, Hardi, who is said to have written not less than six hundred plays. We do not pretend to know much about them; but we find Lacretelle, in the true spirit of his nation, congratulating them upon the fact, which we certainly do not question, that Hardi never reached any of the fine flights of Shakspeare, — since such an elevation, he observes, with his great popularity, might have prevented the French drama from asserting its present glorious analogy to that of Greece! Malherbe, who follows close on this era, brings us down at once to Racan, Meinard, and Voiture, who were the immediate precursors of Corneille.

Corneille was undoubtedly a great and original genius; and, in what we have ventured to say of the general want of nature and of genuine and varied passion in French poetry, we must not be understood as wishing to deal unjustly either by him or his illustrious successors. They were men of taste and talent unquestionably, and fine and accomplished writers in the best sense of the words; and, though we can never allow them to be beings of the same order with the great master-spirits of our own land, or fit to be set in comparison with our Shakspeares, our Miltons, our Spensers, or even our Drydens, we readily admit, that they would be bright ornaments in the literature of any country, and that they fully

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* Memorias para la Historia de la Poesia Espagnola. Madrid, 1775.

rival, and even outshine, some of the greatest lights of our own. The peculiarities of their notions of dramatic excellence form too large a theme to be entered upon here; we may probably take it up separately on some future occasion; but, at present, we shall merely say, that the plays of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, are decidedly superior to any English plays that have been written in imitation of them. Boileau, we think, is at least equal to Pope in his satires, his criticisms, his imitations of the polite writers of antiquity, and the graces and pregnant brevity of his style. He was also the master and model of Pope in all these particulars, and is therefore entitled to be considered as his superior. But he could not have written the Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard — nor the grander passages in the Essay on Man — nor have made such a splendid and lofty poem as Pope has of the translation of the Iliad. The task of rivalling, and perhaps excelling, that great undertaking, was reserved for De Lille. We have nothing to set against La Fontaine, the most *unique*, and, with the exception perhaps of Molière, the most original, of all French poets. Nor can we honestly pretend to find, in the lighter pieces of Prior, Pope, and Swift, any adequate counterpart to that great treasure of light and graceful poetry, *poésies légères*, which is to be found in Chaulieu, Gresset, Gentil Bernard, Dorat, Bouffler, Parny, and the more careless productions of Voltaire. In short, we are not much disposed to deny that the French poets of Louis XIV. are fully equal to the English poets of Queen Anne. But that was by no means the golden age of our poetry; on the contrary, we have always maintained, that the turn it then took to the French models was an aberration from its natural course of advancement, and, in reality, a depravation of its purity, produced by the temporary ascendancy of the foreign taste of the Court after the Restoration. It was the occasion, however, of adding an additional province to the domain of English talent. But in less than a century this comparatively narrow district was completely occupied and explored; and, after having carried that sort of excellence which depends on purity of diction and precision and fineness of thought, to the limited height which it is ever destined to attain, the aspiring and progressive genius of our poetry fell back upon its native models of the 17th century, — where alone it could find a boundless field of adventure, and an inexhaustible harvest of glory. In France, when the same narrow limits had once been reached, in the days of Racine and Voltaire, they had no richer or sweeter models to fall back upon — no perennial springs of melodious passion and fancy in their earlier poets, to which they might recur, when the schoolboy task of classical imitation was done: but finding themselves at once at the end of their career, they had nothing for it but to declare that they had attained perfection! and that their only remaining care must be to degenerate as little as possible from the unprecedented elevation they had gained!

In this condition, accordingly, their poetry remained for the better part of a century — stationary at the best, even in the hands of Voltaire, and, since his death, confessedly declining or extinct — and fated, according to the universal creed of the nation, never by any possibility, to advance beyond the bounds which had been assigned to it by the wits and critics of Louis XIV. The mighty agitation produced by the Revolution — the passions it set loose — the premium which it seemed to set upon talents of all descriptions — and the vast additional numbers to whom it opened the career of ambition, might have been expected to break this "numbing spell" upon the genius of the nation, and to have excited its poets to new topics and new flights of inspiration. Unfortunately, however, no such

effect has followed. The atrocious days of the Revolution were too full of suffering and terror to allow much scope to the pleasing emotions which form the springs and the food of poetry — and, under Bonaparte, the active duties of war engrossed all the aspiring talent of the country, while the sternness of his military sway repressed all those noble and enthusiastic feelings with which the Muse might otherwise have pursued the triumphs of a free people. It is chiefly since his downfal — since the restoration of peace has forced ambitious and ardent spirits into other contentions than those of arms, and the divided state of public opinion has given exaggerated sentiments a power of inflammation that they never before possessed, that poetry has again become an object of national attention, and regained a part of its fire at least, if not of its elegance, in being made subservient to the views of contending factions.

It is chiefly in the form of dramatic pieces that the new race of poets make their appeal to the feelings or prejudices of the public — and that for very obvious reasons. The stage, indeed, has always been the favourite haunt of the French Muse — partly, perhaps, because she was conscious that the strains she inspired required all the aid of scenic pomp, graceful declamation, and the concentrated enthusiasm of assembled multitudes — but chiefly, we believe, because no French author who can possibly obtain it, will ever forego the delight of hearing himself declaimed before a crowded audience, and inhaling, in his own proper person, the intoxicating vapours of his glory, warm as they rise from the hearts and voices of his admirers. In the present situation of the country, however, there are strong additional reasons for this predilection. At Paris, the stage has always been the mouthpiece of popular feeling — and every allusion, however faint and remote, to passing events, or discussions of national importance, is seized upon with a furious vehemence, and made the oracle of opinion. Nay, this is often done without any wish or purpose in the author; and applications are made, and allusions fastened upon him by his hearers, which never entered into his imagination. In a recent instance (at the representation of the *Vêpres Siciliennes* of M. Delavigne), a single phrase, which the author solemnly protested to have been purely casual, was in this manner interpreted into a political insinuation, and at once raised him and his play to a height of glory which they could never otherwise have reached. It is not often, however, that the authors are thus innocent of the factions into the service of which their writings are pressed: — on the contrary, it is to this ready and perilous course of popularity that the greater part of them direct the whole force of their talents. Sharing, as he generally does, in no common degree, in the violent heats and exasperations by which their country is now unhappily divided, the Poet naturally takes a more exaggerated, or, it may be, a more exalted view of them. A passion for independence, love of country, and hatred of foreign influence, are the consequent topics of his verses. Politics, in short, have now usurped the place once occupied by Love, and, like that tender passion, appear *en première ligne*, — though with infinitely more hazard of leading to pernicious effects. It is right that patriotic principles should be inculcated from the stage; but when the theatre is made a forum for the display of national antipathies, it is degraded from its most noble purposes. Yet such appears its chief use at present. "To improve our virtuous sensibility" — Blair's happy definition of the object of tragedy — is no longer the aim of the French stage. The old system and the old pieces are, comparatively speaking, thrown aside. Subjects chosen from ancient history are now altogether

abandoned *: and the example of their best authors is in this respect disregarded. Corneille and Racine both rejected their national history; and even Voltaire cannot be said to have written a national tragedy; for though French *names* are to be found in Adelaide du Guesclin and Zaire, all beyond them is fabulous. La Harpe and Ducis follow the ancient models; and it was left to a far inferior person to make the first experiment of the style which has now superseded every other. The incoherent and complicated plots and inelegant style of Dubelloy, were pardoned for the sake of the patriotic feeling excited by *The Siege of Calais* and *Gaston de Bayard*. The progress of discontent opened the way still wider for the advancement of this national style; and the name of country, so full of inspiration at all times, but most in the days of contention for national rights, was once more destined to exercise its magical influence in France. It is not, however, our intention to discuss either the dramatic or the political merits of the tragedies to which we have alluded, but rather to give our readers a general notion of the present state of Poetry among our neighbours — abstracted as far as possible both from the peculiarities of their dramatic system, and the perturbations of their political dissensions.

Upon this principle, we have selected the three works named at the head of this article as the representatives of the different modifications of that genus to which they all belong. It might not, perhaps, be altogether fanciful to consider them also as epitomes of the three great political sects, into which France is now divided; and which, at this moment, extend their influence, and give their tone and colouring to every branch of literature and science. The Aristocratical, the Constitutional, the Republican, have their followers alike in metaphysics and morals, medicine and mechanics, philosophy and poetry. The pervading spirit of all is *party* spirit; and the common object, political purpose. The fierceness of opinion on the relative merits of the candidates for literary fame, in whatever walk they may choose, is only equalled by its obstinacy; and it is but in the three cases of extraordinary merit which we have selected, that merit has been universally felt and acknowledged. All parties allow the elevation of Delamartine, the energy of Delavigne, the gaiety and wit of

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* *Sylla* and *Regulus*, two recent tragedies, may seem exceptions to this rule. But even these pieces come, in some measure, within it; for their object — at least the audience will have it so — is merely to represent the late Emperor under two remarkable aspects — his abdication and his banishment. In Sylla, Talma carries the resemblance even to his wig! and the effect is prodigious! It is a fact, scarcely credible, that the government ordered this performer, after the first night's representation, to abstain from the action of carrying his hands behind his back, an occasional habit of the late Emperor! A more rational, or at least less ludicrous consideration, induced the censors to suppress the following passages in the part of Sylla: —

" C'était trop peu pour moi des lauriers de la guerre,
Je voulais une gloire et plus rare et plus chère:
Rome, en proie aux fureurs des partis triomphans,
Mourante sous les coups de ses propres enfans,
Invoquait à la fois mon bras et mon génie;
Je me fis Dictateur — je sauvai la patrie."
* * * *
" J'ai gouverné le monde à mes ordres soumis,
Et j'impose silence à tous mes ennemis;
Leur haine ne saurait atteindre ma mémoire,
J'ai mis entre eux et moi l'abîme de ma gloire."

Beranger. The first may be considered as the poetical representative of the high aristocracy — the church-and-state class — the throne-and altar set — the *Ultras* in fact. The second is looked on as the oracle of independence—the champion of nationality — the bard of the *Liberals;* — and the third is by every one regarded as the poet of the *People.* In all these nominations, the first is the only one which is perhaps arbitrary and gratuitous on the part of the public. For certainly *we* can discover nothing in M. Delamartine's writings in sympathy with the exaggerated tone of the party that has indentified him with themselves. But his rivals in popularity bear the impress, in every line, of the fitness of their respective allotments. *

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Having given these brilliant exceptions to a general sentence of condemnation, we must say, in conclusion, that modern French poetry is at a low ebb. Almost all its existing professors give their whole attention to tragedy. Seeking subjects in the ancient annals of their country, they address themselves to political passions, rather than to the heart. Bursts of pompous patriotism, and violent tirades against foreign influence, form the grand staple of their verse. The audience receives this with rapture — but seldom has recourse to its handkerchiefs. Fierce clappings and terrible huzzas are the only fashionable acknowledgments of the author's powers, who, in place of sympathy and tears, draws forth angry invectives and patriotic frowns. The public and the poet thus communicate reciprocal gratification, and inflict reciprocal ill. The one fosters the angry spirit of the times, the other nurtures a vital injury to poetic excellence. Taste becomes vitiated, talent misapplied, a diseased and morbid appetite calls for stimulants of the most pernicious kind; and the hand that administers them falls powerless for every nobler use. But though French poetry must be pronounced in this dangerous and degraded state, there is, as we have seen, no dearth of that spirit from which its highest flames may yet burst forth. The very errors we deplore, prove the existence of enthusiasm, vigorous feeling, and high sentiment. These are among the best attributes of poetry; and, if turned to right account, might still redeem that of France from much of its present debasement.

THE PRESENT STATE OF POETRY IN ENGLAND.†

We have been rather in an odd state for some years, we think, both as to Poets and Poetry. Since the death of Lord Byron, there has been no king in Israel: and none of his former competitors now seem inclined to push their pretensions to the vacant throne. Scott, and Moore, and Southey appear to have nearly renounced verse, and finally taken service with the Muses of prose; — Crabbe, and Coleridge, and Wordsworth, we fear, are burnt out; — and Campbell and Rogers repose under their laurels, and, contented each with his own elegant little domain, seem but

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* The extracts are omitted.

† The Fall of Nineveh; a Poem. By Edwin Atherstone.—Vol. xlviii. p. 47. September, 1828.

little disposed either to extend its boundaries, or to add new provinces to their rule. Yet we cannot say, either that this indifference may be accounted for by the impoverished state of the kingdom whose sovereignty is thus in abeyance, or that the *interregnum* has as yet given rise to any notable disorders. On the contrary, we do not remember a time when it would have been a prouder distinction to be at the head of English poetry, or when the power which every man has to do what is good in his own eyes, seemed less in danger of being abused. Three poets of great promise have indeed been lost, "in the morn and liquid dew of their youth"—in Kirke White, in Keats, and in Pollok; and a powerful, though more uncertain genius extinguished, less prematurely, in Shelley. Yet there still survive writers of great talents and attraction. The elegance, the tenderness, the feminine sweetness of Felicia Hemans—the classical copiousness of Millman—the facility and graceful fancy of Hunt, though defrauded of half its praise by carelessness and presumption—and, besides many others, the glowing pencil and gorgeous profusion of the author more immediately before us.

There is no want, then, of poetry among us at the present day; nor even of very good and agreeable poetry. But there are no miracles of the art—nothing that marks its descent from "the highest heaven of invention"—nothing visibly destined to inherit immortality. Speaking very generally, we would say, that our poets never showed a better or less narrow taste, or a juster relish of what is truly excellent in the models that lie before them, and yet have seldom been more deficient in the powers of creative genius; or rather, perhaps, that with an unexampled command over the raw materials of poetry, and a true sense of their value, they have rarely been so much wanting in the skill to work them up to advantage—in the power of attaching human interests to sparkling fancies, making splendid descriptions subservient to intelligible purposes, or fixing the fine and fugitive spirit of poetry in some tangible texture of exalted reason or sympathetic emotion. The improvement in all departments is no doubt immense, since the days when Hoole and Hayley were thought great poets. But it is not quite clear to us, that the fervid and florid Romeos of the present day may not be gathered, in no very long course of years, to the capacious tomb of these same ancient Capulets. They are but shadows, we fear, that have no independent or substantial existence; and, though reflected from grand and beautiful originals, have but little chance to maintain their place in the eyes of the many generations by whom those originals will yet be worshipped—but who will probably prefer, each in their turn, shadows of their own creating.

The present age, we think, has an hundred times more poetry, and more true taste for poetry, than that which immediately preceded it,—and of which, reckoning its duration from the extinction of the last of Queen Anne's wits down to about thirty odd years ago, we take leave to say that it was, beyond all dispute, the most unpoetical age in the annals of this or any other considerable nation. Nothing, indeed, can be conceived more dreary and sterile than the aspect of our national poetry from the time of Pope and Thomson, down to that of Burns and Cowper. With the exception of a few cold and scattered lights—Gray, Goldsmith, Warton, Mason, and Johnson—men of sense and eloquence occasionally exercising themselves in poetry out of scholar-like ambition, but not poets in any genuine sense of the word—the whole horizon was dark, silent, and blank; or only presented objects upon which it is now impossible to look

seriously without shame.* These were the happy days of Pye and Whitehead — of Hoole and of Hayley; and then, throughout the admiring land, resounded the mighty names of Jerningham and Jago, of Edwards, of Murphy, of Moore, and of others whom we cannot but feel it is a baseness to remember.

The first man who broke "the numbing spell" was Cowper— (for Burns was not generally known till long after) — and though less highly gifted than several who came after him, this great praise should always be remembered in his epitaph. He is entitled, in our estimation, to a still greater praise; and that is, to the praise of absolute and entire originality. Whatever he added to the resources of English poetry, was drawn directly from the fountains of his own genius, or the stores of his own observation. He was a copyist of no style — a restorer of no style; and did not, like the eminent men who succeeded him, merely recall the age to the treasures it had almost forgotten, open up anew a vein that had been long buried in rubbish, or revive a strain which had already delighted the ears of a more aspiring generation. That this, however, was the case with the poets who immediately followed, cannot, we think, be reasonably doubted; and the mere statement of the fact seems to us sufficiently to explain the present state of our poetry — its strength and its weakness — its good taste and its deficient power — its resemblance to works that can never die, and its own obvious liability to the accidents of mortality.

It has advanced beyond the preceding age, simply by going back to one still older; and has put *its* poverty to shame, only by unlocking the hoards of a remoter ancestor. It has reformed merely by restoring; and innovated by a systematic recurrence to the models of antiquity. Scott went back as far as to the Romances of Chivalry; and the poets of the lakes to the humbler and more pathetic simplicity of our early ballads; and both, and all who have since adventured in poetry, have drawn, without measure or disguise, from the living springs of Shakspeare and Spenser, and the other immortal writers who adorned the glorious era of Elizabeth and James.

It is impossible to value more highly than we do the benefits of this restoration. It is a great thing to have rendered the public once more familiar with these mighty geniuses — and, if we must be copyists, there is nothing certainly that deserves so well to be copied. The consequence, accordingly, has been, that, even in our least inspired writers, we can again reckon upon freedom and variety of style, some sparks of fancy, some traits of nature, and some echo, however feeble, of that sweet melody of rhythm and of diction, which must linger for ever in every ear which has once drank in the music of Shakspeare; while, in authors of greater vigour, we are sure to meet also with gorgeous descriptions and splendid imagery, tender sentiments expressed in simple words, and vehement passions pouring themselves out in fearless and eloquent declamation.

But, with all this, it is but too true that we have still a feeling that we are glorying but in secondhand finery and counterfeit inspiration; and that the poets of the present day, though they have not only Taste enough to admire, but skill also to imitate, the great masters of an earlier generation,

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* We ought, perhaps, to have made an exception for Akenside, who, though often weak and pedantic, has passages of powerful poetry—and for Collins, a great master of fine and delicate diction, though poor in thought and matter. But we will make none for Churchill or Shenstone.

have not inherited the Genius that could have enabled them either to have written as they wrote, or even to have come up, without their example, to the level of their own imitations. The heroes of our modern poetry, indeed, are little better, as we take it, than the heroes of the modern theatres — attired, no doubt, in the exact costume of the persons they represent, and wielding their gorgeous antique arms with an exact imitation of heroic movements and deportment — nay, even evincing in their tones and gestures, a full sense of inward nobleness and dignity — and yet palpably unfit to engage in any feat of actual prowess, and incapable, in their own persons, even of conceiving what they have been so well taught to personate. We feel, in short, that our modern poetry is substantially derivative, and, as geologists say of our present earth, of secondary formation — made up of the *débris* of a former world, and composed, in its loftiest and most solid parts, of the fragments of things far more lofty and solid.

The consequence, accordingly, is, that we have abundance of admirable descriptions, ingenious similitudes, and elaborate imitations — but little invention, little direct or overwhelming passion, and little natural simplicity. On the contrary, every thing almost now resolves into description — descriptions not only of actions and external objects, but of characters and emotions, and the signs and accompaniments of emotion, — and all given at full length, ostentatious, elaborate, and highly finished, even in their counterfeit carelessness and disorder; but no sudden unconscious bursts, either of nature or of passion — no casual flashes of fancy, — no slight passing intimations of deep but latent emotions,—no rash darings of untutored genius, soaring proudly up into the infinite unknown! The chief fault, however, is the want of subject and of matter — the absence of real persons, intelligible interests, and conceivable incidents, to which all this splendid apparatus of rhetoric and fancy may attach itself, and thus get a purpose and a meaning, which it never can possess without them. To satisfy a rational being, even in his most sensitive mood, we require not only a just representation of passion in the abstract, but also that it shall be embodied in some individual person whom we can understand and sympathise with — and cannot long be persuaded to admire splendid images and ingenious allusions which bear upon no comprehensible object, and seem to be introduced for no other purpose than to be admired.

Without going the full length of the mathematician, who could see no beauty in poetry because it *proved* nothing, we cannot think it quite unreasonable to insist on knowing a little what it is about; and must be permitted to hold it a good objection to the very finest composition, that it gives us no distinct conceptions, either of character, of action, of passion, or of the author's design in laying it before us. Now this, we think, is undeniably the prevailing fault of our modern poets. What they do best is description — in a story certainly they do not excel — their pathos is too often overstrained and rhetorical, and their reflections mystical and bombastic. The great want, however, as we have already said is the want of solid subject, and of persons who can be supposed to have existed. There is plenty of splendid drapery and magnificent localities — but nobody to put on the one, or to inhabit and vivify the other. Instead of living persons, we have commonly little else than mere puppets or academy figures — and very frequently are obliged to be contented with scenes of still life altogether — with gorgeous dresses tossed into glittering heaps, or suspended in dazzling files — and enchanted solitudes, where we wait in

vain for some beings like ourselves, to animate its beauties with their loves, or to aggravate its horrors by their contentions.

The consequence of all this is, that modern poems, with great beauty of diction, much excellent description, and very considerable displays of taste and imagination, are generally languid, obscure, and tiresome. Short pieces, however, it should be admitted, are frequently very delightful — elegant in composition, sweet and touching in sentiment, and just and felicitous in expressing the most delicate shades both of character and emotion. Where a single scene, thought, or person, is to be represented, the improved taste of the age, and its general familiarity with beautiful poetry, will generally ensure, from our better artists, not only a creditable, but a very excellent production. What used to be true of *female* poets only, is now true of all. We have not wings, it would seem, for a long flight — and the larger works of those who pleased us most with their small ones, scarcely ever fail of exhibiting the very defects from which we should have thought them most secure — and turn out insipid, verbose, and artificial, like their neighbours. In little poems, in short, which do not require any choice or management of subject, we succeed very well; but where a story is to be told, and an interest to be sustained, through a considerable train of incidents and variety of characters, our want of vigour and originality is but too apt to become apparent; and is only the more conspicuous from our skilful and familiar use of that inspired diction, and those poetical materials, which we have derived from the mighty masters to whose vigour and originality they were subservient, and on whose genius they waited but as "servile ministers."

SKETCH OF SPANISH POETRY ANTECEDENT TO THE AGE OF CHARLES THE FIFTH.*

Spanish poetry seems naturally to divide itself into two great epochs, — the one extending from the infancy of language and versification down to the reign of Charles V.; the other commencing with the revolution then introduced by the imitation of the Italian models, and continuing to the present day. These periods are separated by broad and striking distinctions. The authors that belong to them stand opposed to each other in the whole spirit of their compositions — in the sources of their inspiration, in the end which they proposed to themselves, and the means by which it was to be obtained. In the former, we recognise that state of society when Poetry, instead of being the anxious task of a few, is the business or amusement of the nation at large; when it is characterised, not by the pre-eminence of some one individual, but by a general diffusion of imagination, overflowing in romance and song; when it knows and needs no foreign models, but animates its minutest productions with a spirit of intense nationality. In the latter, we perceive how naturally men are disposed, at a certain period of civilisation, to abandon the poetry of

* 1. Silva de Viejos Romances. Publicada por Jacobo Grimm. 2. Sammlung der besten Alten Spanischen, Historischen, Ritter und Maurischen Romanzen. Von Ch. B. Depping. 3. Floresta de Rimas Antiguas Castellanas. Por D. J. Nicholas Böhl de Faber.—Vol. xxxix. p. 393. January, 1824.

impulse for that of art — to prefer rules to inspiration — to adopt the literature of strangers — to translate rather than to create — and to imitate rather than to furnish models for imitation.

It is to the first, and certainly the more interesting period, that the works which we have prefixed to this article relate. The collection of M. Grimm is occupied principally with the ballads connected with the fabulous history of Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers. M. Depping's is a miscellaneous collection of Narrative Romances; and the Floresta of M. Böhl de Faber contains specimens both of the ballads and the short lyrical pieces which, under the title of Canciones, Villancicos, Chanzonetas, &c. fill so large a portion of the Cancioneros and Romanceros of Spain. In attempting to convey to our readers some idea of this great mass of popular poetry, it will be our object to sketch rather than to detail; to treat the subject only in its general features, without descending minutely into classification; and to avoid, as much as possible, the necessity of particular criticism and long quotations. Spanish literature is, of all others, that which can be least appreciated by extracts and translations. Its excellence consists not in insulated beauties, but in that noble national spirit, which, like a great connecting principle, pervades and harmonises the whole.

There is something, at first sight, extremely melancholy in the decline of a great literature. The mind clings instinctively to what it has, and refuses to be comforted for its loss even in the prospect of a brighter futurity. But the history of literature tends at last to soften this feeling of regret. It teaches us to consider these national catastrophes only as the developement of a great principle of succession, by which the treasures of mind are circulated and equalised — as shocks by which the stream of improvement is forcibly directed into new channels, to fertilise new soils, and awaken new capabilities. Zoroaster dies, but the lore of the Magi and the Chaldees is preserved by the Egyptians. Egypt sinks into decay, but the mantle of Hermes is bequeathed to Plato; and Rome rises into literary greatness when the world is beginning to retort upon the fallen Greeks the epithet of Barbarians. Even the darkness which succeeded the dissolution of the Roman empire was but temporary. The sun only set in Europe to rise in Asia — pale, indeed, and obscured for a time, under the tempestuous reigns of the immediate successors of Mahomet, but regaining its brightness under Al Raschid and Al Maimoun. Knowledge had only completed its circle; and the Western world was a second time to receive from the East the seeds of improvement and the elements of greatness.

The rapid growth of Arabian literature is one of the most striking phenomena of history. Arabia seemed rather to recollect than to acquire — rather to revive a deceased literature, than to create a new. She entered on the vast field of knowledge as on a paternal inheritance, not with the hesitation of a discoverer, but with the confidence of one to whom every "dingle and alley green of that wild wood" had been once familiar, and whose recollections were revived by the sight of her accustomed walks and familiar trees. A century had hardly elapsed from the barbarous era of the Hegira, when the court of Haroun Al Raschid was the centre of science and arts. A hundred and twenty years after the pretended burning of the Alexandrian library, public libraries were opened even in the obscurest cities of the Arabian empire. Bagdad, Balsora, Balkh, Cufa, Ispahan, and Samarcand, vied with each other in the number of their colleges and learned men. Kings sat at the feet of sages to learn wisdom; and the whole empire seemed but one vast academy, where all

were either teachers or disciples, communicating or receiving knowledge. Every branch of science, exact or speculative, the Arabs had studied with success; and as the growth of their literature had been as rapid as their conquests, it seemed as if its extent would be vast and varied as the territories they had acquired.

It is in the poetry of the Arabians that the effects of this sudden rise of their literature are most visible. In the severer sciences, it matters little, perhaps, by what stages a nation arrives at perfection. Knowledge is still the same, whether it be acquired by laborious study, or with the rapidity of apparent intuition; but the growth of poetry, it would seem, must be gradual, if the frame is to be strong and healthy. There is an infancy in nations, as well as individuals, during which the reflecting faculties repose, while the materials of reflection are accumulated; and in both, premature developement generally announces premature decay. During this period, men act, and record actions, but they do not speculate, or commemorate feelings; and hence narrative poetry naturally precedes that of contemplation. But the sudden diffusion of science seems to have at once impelled the Arabians into the region of thought; for their poetry wears, from the first, that cast of meditation which, in other nations, has been prepared by centuries of activity, and preceded by a long series of narrative compositions. They have no national recollections embodied in ballads and chronicles — no Heldenbuch or Nibelungen.* The luxury of study, and the despotic nature of their government seem to have nipped in the bud the tales of bravery and warlike adventure which, in less cultivated countries, form the amusement of the populace; and the want of these has communicated to their poetry a monotony of thought and expression. Like the character of the people, it is a compound of subtlety and passion: sometimes delighting, but oftener chilling the imagination by a spirit of refinement and analysis — exalting the feelings by the boldness of its imagery, only to precipitate them again by its extravagance; — at times bursting out into a majestic sweep of passion, or filling the mind with delightful dreams of pastoral stillness and simplicity; and then again relapsing into complaints of imaginary evils and fabricated distresses, which neither come from the heart nor are addressed to it. The poetry of the Northern nations is content to touch. That of the Arabians must dazzle too. The one operates by the unity, the other by the variety, of its impressions. The one is like its own Gothic cathedrals — stately, solemn, shadowy — softening down every feeling into one deep sense of religious veneration: — the other is like the fantastic edifices of the East, all sunshine and splendour — broken into parts, and distracting the eye with the glitter of spires and minarets and porticoes.

Such was the state of Arabia, when, in 712, the defeat of Roderick at Xeres de la Frontera introduced the Arabian conquerors into Spain, and brought into contact the polish of the East with the barbarism of Europe. The fairest provinces of the Peninsula were now added to their already enormous empire; and, under their mild and yet powerful government, Cordova, Granada, Seville, and Valencia, soon disputed the palm of intellectual superiority with Bagdad and Balsora. The fanaticism which had attended the rise of their empire, no longer kept alive by opposition, had declined; and the Christian subjects of the Abbasides and Ommiades at first experienced protection, not persecution, from their conquerors. Under the name of Moçarabes, they become mingled with the Moors in every thing but

* The Shah Nameh is a single exception.

religion. They possessed nearly the same privileges — they distinguished themselves in the same sciences — and reaped the same rewards. They were united by a community of loves, friendships, and amusements; and that bigotry which, at an after period, disgraced the annals of both countries, was then unheard of. It was only as their empire narrowed, that their religious animosities began. It was only when the tide began to turn in favour of Christian Spain, and the once great territory of the Caliphs had shrunk into the small province of Granada, that those feelings of bitter and unrelenting hostility on both sides were called forth, which, under the weak policy of Philip III., and the persecuting spirit of the Inquisition, at last deprived Spain of 300,000 of her subjects.

The contrast presented by the state of Christian Spain was striking. The Spaniards possessed a noble and expressive language, but no literature — a vast fund of poetical capabilities, but no poetry. Historical events had been transmitted to them, not in the stubborn unyielding form of a chronicle, but in the changing garb of tradition, to which every successive possessor had added new ornaments. With them the military profession was every thing — with the Arabians it was nothing: — the former, like the other Gothic nations, surrounded themselves with romantic — the latter with classical associations. The Arabs had appealed but little to national feelings or recollections. It was for himself that the poet claimed the sympathy of his readers; — with his own hopes and fears — happiness or misfortune. It was a solitary appeal — a selfish inspiration, which operated only by its individual excellence or insignificance. But the Spaniards had been unconsciously surrounding history with the light of imagination — linking great names with great deeds — concentrating those universal recollections in which every one feels he has a part, and silently building up the fabric of national poetry on the basis of national enthusiasm.

But it was impossible that a connection so intimate as that which had subsisted for centuries between the rival nations, should be without its effect. Arabia exercised on Spain the influence of knowledge over ignorance; but she, at the same time, felt the power which a great and commanding character must exert over minds of more cultivated but feebler texture; and while Spanish literature was refined by the intercourse with the Arabians, the influence of the chivalrous spirit and devoted patriotism of Spain, on Arabian feeling, was visible in an increased elevation of tone — a stronger sense of national dignity, and a system of manners, which, as delineated in the "Civil Wars of Granada," might have vied in gallantry, refinement, and knightly courtesy, with the most splendid imaginations of Amadis and Palmerin.

In tracing the influence of Arabian on Spanish literature, a distinction must be kept in view, which, as far as we are aware, has been hitherto overlooked, but certainly existing in fact, as it is explicable on philosophical principle. That influence was not equal. Between the narrative poetry of the Spaniards and the literature of the East, there exist scarcely any features of resemblance; — between what in both countries may be called the poetry of sentiment, the relations are infinite. The *Romances* do not possess a single characteristic which we have been accustomed to consider as *peculiar* to Oriental literature. Instead of that diffuseness — that conglomeration of imagery, and that taint of exaggeration, which seems inseparable from Eastern poetry, they are characterised by a peculiar spirit of simplicity — a straight-forward earnestness, which thinks only of the end, and presses on, without turning to the right hand

or the left, in search of ornament. But there is another point of distinction still more striking. There is no surer test of the influence of one nation over another, than the adoption or rejection of its fictions. Arabia, it is true, had no narrative poetry — but she possessed a substitute, to ordinary minds as brilliant and captivating, in those splendid tales of wonder and enchantment, which have excited so powerful an influence over the literature of Europe; and had they been in unison with the Spanish character, it is but reasonable to suppose, that that influence, which extended to countries so remote from the seat of these fictions, should have been strongest where their operation was most direct and immediate. But the stream of fiction, like the fabled waters of Syracuse, seems to seek a congenial climate, and to rise into light when its appearance is least expected. While the early Romances of France, and the Fabliaux of the Trouveres, exhibit, at every step, the traces of Arabian imagination, with which we have become familiar in the poems of Berni and Ariosto, — those splendid palaces that rise in deserts, glittering with gold and diamonds — those magic rings, flying horses, impenetrable armour, and enchanted castles — those genii, giants, peris, and magicians, presiding over the destinies of mankind, and alternately persecuting or protecting their votaries; — or those humbler tales of humour and comic adventure *, which seem to have been so congenial to the imagination of Boccaccio and the Italian novelists, — the Spanish poetry is of a character completely opposite. Their earliest romances, which are those relating to Charlemagne and the Peers, though founded on subjects connected with the French romances by strong analogies, have treated them in a manner totally different; and the romances of Amadis and his descendants, in which the characteristics of Arabian invention are subsequently to be found, were, in their leading features, borrowed at second-hand from that mass of romances which appeared in France under the reign of Philip (1275 to 1280), when his venal court flattered him with the title of a second Charlemagne. The causes of this striking difference between the traces of Arabian influence in the narrative and in the lyrical poems, is, after all, not difficult to be accounted for. Narrative poetry is little susceptible of variation. In the recital of events, there are always some fixed points — some things, which in all ages, will be related nearly in the same way — some features which do not yield to the change of habits or the polish of thought. But the poetry of sentiment follows the course of manners. Rough and impassioned in their infancy, it advances with them to cultivation, and sinks with them into artifice and over-refinement. Besides, the mass of tradition which was embodied in the Spanish romances, had existed long before Arabian literature arose to embellish or disguise. Its tales were familiar to the national mind, in their minutest details. They were consecrated and unalterable. But, till then, the Spaniards had not reflected, nor studied their feelings. Example had established no prescriptive rules — no canons of lyrical expression. With the knowledge of the Arabians they had imbibed much of their habits and manners; and, feeling as they did, they expressed their feelings

* Such are the Fabliaux of "Le Manteau mal taillé, from the Mirror of Prince Zeyn Alasnam — Lanval, from the story of Peri Banou — Constant du Hamel, from the Bahar Danush — Du Voleur qui descendit, from the Fables of Bidpai — Les Trois Bossus and Le Sacristain de Cluni, from the Little Hunchback — Les Trois Aveugles, from the Adventures of the Barber's Brothers — Le Jugement sur les Barils, from the story of Ali Cogia."

with the same alternations of fiery emotion and frigid analysis, with the same superfluity of expression, and the same extravagance of imagery.

Indeed, the supposition that the Romances, in their present shape, have been in any great degree indebted for their excellences to the influence of Arabian taste, could have arisen only from looking at one side of the question, and overlooking the influence, which, we have already said, Spain, in its turn, exerted over Arabia. No doubt, at a later period, the Ballads of Granada celebrated the same events as the Spanish romances, and in strains of a similar nature; but, instead of exerting any influence over the romantic poetry of Spain, these ballads themselves owed their existence to that spirit of chivalry which had preceded the establishment of the Arabian empire, as it was destined to survive its decline.

The narrative poetry of Spain, then, divides itself from the lyrical and didactic, by national as well as generic distinctions. And we have thus a double reason for adopting the arrangement, which it is our intention to follow out in this article; commencing with the narrative romances, and briefly resuming the connection of Spanish with Arabian poetry, when we come to consider the interminable *canciones* and *redondillas* of Spain.

Never perhaps has there existed in any country a richer fund of those materials, from which the Ballad Poetry of a nation takes its rise, than in Spain. Its history is fruitful of evil and of good; abounding with great events and striking catastrophes — with all that is calculated powerfully to elevate, to impress, and to agitate. The memory of the disastrous battle which had terminated the dynasty of the Visigoths in Spain — the rash revenge of Julian, and the mysterious fate of Rodrigo, were opposed to the splendid recollections of the field of Roncesvalles, the heroic resistance of Pelayo in Asturia, and the exploits of Bernardo del Carpio. Then came the glorious deeds of the Cid — his youthful quarrel — his love for Ximena — his devotion to his sovereign, repaid, like that of Bernardo, with constant ingratitude — his residence among the Moors, and his triumphant return. Then, again, the scene darkened — the fraternal quarrels of Peter the Cruel and Henry of Transtamara, the Spanish Polynices and Eteocles — the murder of the Master of St. Jago — the melancholy fate of the innocent Blanche — the grief of Maria de Padilla, even more unfortunate than guilty, shook the mind with alternate feelings of horror and compassion. Last came the conquest of Granada, with all that mass of legends which it opened to the conquerors — its tournaments and fêtes of canes — its bull-feasts and Zambras — the glories of the Alhambra and Albaycin — the magic beauties of the Generalife — the quarrels of the rival houses of the Zegris and Abencerrages, " those names so sonorous and so melodious*," — the accusation of the queen — the tragedy of the Court of Lions — the murder of Morayma — and the romantic interest of the combat, where the honour of the queen was vindicated against the treacherous Zegris by Spanish valour. The number of ballads founded on these and similar events, far exceeds that of any other nation; but this superiority in point of number is perhaps rather apparent than real. These poems which, in other countries, have been left to the imperfect recollections of the peasantry, or collected only when the best part of them had disappeared, had the good fortune to be published in Spain so early as the year 1510, in the Collection of Ferdinand de Castillo. His collection was followed by the *Cancionero de Ro-*

* Quintana.

mances, of Antwerp, in 1555, that of Sepulveda in 1566, and the *Romancero Historiado* of Lucas Rodriguez in 1579. But, even if the number of Spanish romances does really exceed those which have been produced in other countries, the difference is sufficiently accounted for — partly by the nature of the climate, which allowed more time for recreation — and partly by the extreme ease of the system of Spanish versification, and the facilities afforded by the language.

But the difficulty lies not in accounting for the number, but the peculiarities, of the Spanish ballads. When we compare the early literature of Spain with those of other countries, — with our own Border ballads for instance, — we are at once struck by the visible superiority of the former in point of refinement and nobleness of tone. In general, we peruse the early monuments of literature with curiosity, rather than pleasure. They describe a set of manners revolting in themselves, but interesting, because they differ so completely from our own, in language which excites our interest, precisely because it seems to have created no surprise in the narrator; because *he* considers as a matter of course what appears to us so unaccountable; and our pleasure is rather the result of comparison, than the effect of any thing which the works intrinsically contain. But the manners described in the Spanish ballads do not require the apology of the rudeness of the age, or derive their interest only from their opposition to our own. They are in themselves noble, delicate, and refined — breathing of courts and camps, and of bravery softened and humanised by chivalry.

The causes of this superiority, the existence of which is undoubted, must be looked for, in the peculiar circumstances under which Spain was placed. Its early constitution under the descendants of Pelayo, was peculiarly calculated to call forth exalted sentiments — to render a man important in his own eyes and those of others, and to nourish an enthusiastic temperament. But the feelings which a sense of independence, and the striking events of Spanish history, were calculated to awaken, were also left in Spain to their free and unfettered operation. Separated from other countries by a barrier of seas and mountains, which rendered commercial intercourse almost impossible, she was allowed to indulge her enthusiastic propensities without restraint. Her feelings were not subjected to the test of examination or comparison, or chilled by the ridicule of strangers, who, uninfluenced by the same associations, would have looked upon her world of imagination only under the ridiculous point of view which enthusiasm always presents to the eye of reason. In the early literature of France and Italy, we perceive, at once, an *esprit de commerce* destroying all high aspirations — weakening passion by indifference — levelling every thing to the standard of utility, and preparing, from the first, that ridicule of great and generous emotions which was afterwards to characterise the works of Berni and Ariosto. Poetry, has, unfortunately, at all times but too strong a tendency to descend. Every where it has been her fate gradually to narrow her flight — to stoop from divine to heroic, from heroic to common life: but it is an evil omen for the moral greatness of a nation when its poets anticipate the period of ridicule, and accelerate by an unnatural impulse the rapidity of a descent, which is, at best, but too certain and too speedy. Poetry may be said to hang between earth and heaven; and *they* seem but little deserving of the gratitude of their countrymen who endeavour to fix their attention on the degrading chains which pinion her to the ground, rather than on the golden links that connect her with heaven. But Spain was untouched by the influence of such

feelings. There the glorious deeds of antiquity became blended with the habitual feelings of the people. They were in the mouths of all the peasantry.* They were sung in the summer evenings to the accompaniment of the harp and the guitar, and they constituted the chief amusements of the solejares, when in winter the inhabitants of the villages court the beams of the sun, and, like the "Council of Ten" in the Decameron, or the Mahometan story-tellers, circulate the stores of tradition.

The combined effects of these feelings of independence and of chivalrous enthusiasm on the poetry of the nation, will be intelligible by a single example. Every one is aware of the perfect indifference as to honesty and notions of property which is so common in the Border ballads of England and Scotland, and of the vulgar and degrading nature of the subjects which they generally describe. Our minstrels seem to have known no distinction between the noblest actions and the most reprehensible. The exploits of Robin Hood — the outlaw Murray and Armstrong, — are, at least, as celebrated as those of Wallace or Percy. Sherwood Forest is as classic ground as Bannockburn. A Border foray is placed side by side with a battle; and the stealing of a mare, or the "lifting" of a given number of cattle, is celebrated with as much pomp as the proudest displays of valour or patriotism. The wild life of an outlaw seems to have had something in it particularly captivating; and there is nothing which is dwelt upon with more pleasure than the ideas of merriment and liberty attached to it.

"Merry it is in the grene woode,
Among the levès grene,
Whereas men hunt both east and west
With bows and arrows keen." †

Under a state of manners considerably more refined, but yet connected with ours by strong resemblances, we find in the compositions of the Trouveres the same tendency to waste the labour of imagination on subjects very unworthy of such inspiration. An ingenious trick, or a successful robbery, is always a subject on which they delight to expatiate,— such are the Fabliaux, "Du Curé et des deux Ribands,"—"Brifaut"— "Boiven de Provins," and the well known tale by Jean de Boves, "Les Trois Larrons," which has been translated into most of the European languages. But the Spanish ballads are pitched in a higher key. With the exception of some questionable exploits of Rinaldo, alluded to in one of the ballads relating to the court of Charlemagne ‡, and an incident in the Chronicle of the Cid, we do not recollect an instance where the early Spanish poets have ventured on this ground, which is so familiar to the Northern Minstrels and the French Trouveres. It was only under the reign of Charles V. that the "*picaresco*" taste was introduced and sanctioned, by the universal talent of Mendoza; and it is from the publication of his Lazarillo de Tormes, that we must date the appearance of that host of novels, describing only the adventures of sharpers, and minions of the moon, which Le Sage has presented in a softened

* One theological writer inveighs bitterly against the popularity of the ballads of the Twelve Peers, which he styles the "*laus perennis* de los zapateros," the prayer-book of the shoemakers or artisans.

† Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudeslye.

‡ They are also mentioned in the First Chapter of Don Quixote, who admired Rinaldo exceedingly for the ingenuity of his robberies.

shape, and adorned with all the graces of polished satire, in his Gil Blas.

Another striking feature of these ballads, and perhaps the only one which can really be traced to the influence of the Arabs, is the spirit of humanity and gentleness which they indicate. Elevation of thought, courage, and respect for engagements, are consistent with a very imperfect degree of civilisation; but humanity in war is the product of an enlightened age. The border warfare of our own countries was a contest of mutual barbarism, which tended rather to aggravate than to soften the native roughness of the combatants; but the long struggle between Spain and Arabia was the meeting of rudeness with refinement; and war, which in other countries, has been the means of perpetuating ignorance, was, in Spain, one of those instruments by which the national character was insensibly refined. The following expansion of the old Roman maxim, "Parcere subjectis," &c. could only have proceeded from a nation accustomed to receive the like treatment from cultivated adversaries: —

"Perdone al vencido triste,
Que no puede tomar lanza;
No des lugar que tu brazo
Rompa las medrosas armas:
Mas en tanto que durare
En tu contrario la saña,
No dudes el golpe fiero,
No perdones la estocada." *

"Spare the unforunate vanquished, when the enfeebled arm cannot wield the lance — break not the bruised reed — but while the vigour of thine adversary endures, stint not the blow — spare not the thrust."

The influence of this feeling of gentleness has extended itself in these ballads, both to the choice of subjects and the manner in which they are treated. The early literature of Germany, as well as our own, is characterised by a fondness for extravagant horrors and details of cruelty; the natural result of that obtuseness of moral feeling which requires to be operated upon by the most violent stimuli, and which can find, in the ordinary course of human events, no sufficient source of excitement. No one can look at the ballads in Percy's Reliques, or the Minstrelsy of the Border, without being struck with the preponderance of disgusting details; — cool and and deliberate murders perpetrated almost without a motive, and related in language which betrays no sort of feeling on the part of the narrator, and a constant leaning to the description of things offensive and forbidden. Such, for instance, are the ballads of Lord William, Lord Randal, Young Benjie, The Cruel Sister, The Jew's Daughter, and many others even of a darker cast, which will readily occur to any one at all acquainted with Scottish romance. Now, it is true that, in the Spanish ballads, the details of crime do occur, but the attention is artfully withdrawn from the catastrophe itself to the causes which lead to it; and its horrors are softened by the description of the struggles which preceded, or the remorse that followed, the commission of the crime. Let any one compare the Scottish ballad of Jellon Græme, which is too revolting to be quoted, but which narrates the murder of a young and helpless female by her lover, with the Spanish ballad of Count Alarcos, in which a similar

* The hermit, in the Romance of Ysaie, gives the hero the same lesson: "Chevalier, sois *cruel à tes ennemis* — débonnaire à tes amis — *humble à non puissans*, et aimez toujours le droit à soutenir." — Ysaie le Triste.

tragedy is related. What cold-blooded atrocity in the first—what mournful tenderness and pathos in the second! The melancholy flow of the prolonged consonante seems to add double sweetness to the ballad. When Alarcos receives from the king the fatal order to put his wife to death—

" Llorando si parte el conde—llorando sin alegria,†
Llorando por la condessa, que mas que a si la queria;
Llora tambien el conde, por tres hijos que tenia,
El uno era de teta que la condessa lo cria.
* * * *
Antes que llegase el conde estas razones decia,
Quien podra mirar condessa vuestra cara de alegria,
Que saldreys a recebirme a la fin de vuestra vida,
Yo soy el triste culpado — esta culpa toda es mia.
* * * *
Sentose el conde a la mesa — no cenava ni poma
Con sus hijos al costado — que muy mucho los queria
Echo se sobre los ombros — hizo como que dormia
De lagrimas de sus ojos, toda la mesa cubria
Mirandolo la condessa, que la causa no sabia,
No le preguntava nada que no osava ni podia;
Llevantose luego el conde — *dixo, que dormir queria;*
Dixo tambien la condessa, quella tambien dormiria,
Mas entrellos no avia sueño — se la verdad se decia.
* * * *

In justice, however, we must observe, that there is one particular in which the Spanish Ballads have less pretension to a dignified morality. With all their respect for the Eighth Commandment, the Seventh, in its spirit at least, does not seem to have met with the same attention. We need scarcely remind our readers of the frequency with which the circumstances of pregnancy and parturition are brought forward in our ballads, and of the complacent tone in which such incidents are generally related. We rather think the allusions to this subject are less frequent in the Spanish, and they are certainly free from that libertine air which characterises our own; but enough remains to show, that, on these points, a very accommodating system of morality prevailed—very inconsistent, no doubt, with the ideal of chivalry, but, we believe, exceedingly consonant to its practice. The number of romances which are either founded entirely on such incidents, or in which allusions to them occur, are almost innumerable. Those of Reynaldos de Montalban — Conde Aleman — De las reales Bodas — De la Hija del Rey de Francia — and Don Galvan, occur to us at this moment. In Conde Claros, which bears a considerable resemblance in its opening to the ballad of Sir Cauline in Percy's collection, and to Boccaccio's Gismunda, the interest arises from the consequences of an illicit amour. In the *Romance* del Hijo del Rey de Francia, the Infanta complains—

" Tiempo es el Cavallero — tiempo es de andar d'aqui,
Que ni puedo andar al pie ni al Emperador servir:
Pues me crece la barriga — y se me acorta el vestir,
Verguença he de mis donzellas las que me dan el vestir
Miranse unas a otras — no hacen sino reir."

† Our Spanish readers will perhaps be surprised at this system of compressing two short lines into one; — but we have followed Grimm; who gives three reasons for doing so: — 1. That he thinks they were originally written in that way; — 2. that if they were not, it would have been better if they had; — 3. and lastly, that this manner of printing them is a great saving of room. It is this last reason that appears to us the strongest.

To which she receives a reply more remarkable for its *sang froid* than its politeness.

" *Paridlo, Señora, Paridlo; que asi hizo mi madre a mi.*"

In the Romance de Baldovinos y de la linda Sevilla, the lady convicts Nuño of a falsehood with regard to the death of her lover, by proving a clear *alibi.*

" Nuño vero — Nuño vero mal Cavallero provado
Yo te pregunto per nuevas — tu me respondes al contrario
Que aquesta noche pasada conmigo durmiera el Franco;
El me diera una sortija — yo le di un pendon labrado."

And in another we find no less a personage than Virgil doing penance in person for seven years,*

" Por una traycion que hizo en los palacios del Rey,
Porque forzo a una donçella, llamada Doña Ysabel."

Before concluding these general remarks on the characteristics of the Spanish Ballads, we may notice, that while the Arabian mythology and fictions seem never to have made any figure in the early poetry of Spain, few traces are to be found of those darker and more gloomy imaginations which are so common in the literature of the Northern nations. Voices, apparitions, and spirits that ride in mists and storms, are peculiar to the latter. A belief in dreams and omens only is common to them with the Spanish Romances. The dream of Doña Alda, before she receives the intelligence of the death of her husband at Roncesvalles, is quite in the style of the Northern ballad.

We use Mr. Lockhart's translation: —

" O my maidens, quoth the lady, my heart it is full sore,
I have dreamt a dream of evil, and can never slumber more.

For I was upon a mountain, in a bare and desert place,
And I saw a mighty eagle, and a falcon he did chase,
And to me the falcon came, and I hid it in my breast —
But the mighty bird pursuing, came and rent away my vest —
And he scatter'd all the feathers, and blood was on his beak,
And ever as he tore and tore, I heard the falcon shriek —
Now read my vision, damsels, now read my dream to me,
For my heart may well be heavy, that doleful sight to see."

Our Teutonic Minstrel is a little more rude: —

" I dreamt in my sweven on Thursday eve,
In my bed whereon I lay —
I dreamt a grype and a grimlie breast
Had carried my crown away.
My gorget and my kirtle of gold,
And all my fair head geare;
And he would worry me with his beak,
And to his nest y-beare.

* Those who are acquainted with the figure which Virgil makes in the writings of the middle ages, will not be surprised at the odd situation in which he is placed by the Spanish poet. The writers of that day seem to have delighted in exhibiting the great characters of antiquity as victims of love. In the Romance of Vergilius, a story is given of his having been pulled half-way up a tower in a basket, by a lady of whom he was enamoured, and then left suspended and exposed to the ridicule of the multitude. The story has been transferred to Hippocrates, and occurs in the Fabliaux. It is one of those, we believe, that has been verified by Imbert.

Saving there came a little grey hawke,
A merlin him we call,
Which unto the ground did strike the grype,
That dead he down did fall." — *Sir Aldingar.*

The absence of the darker features of the marvellous, is certainly one of those national peculiarities which may safely be attributed to the influence of climate. The imagination of the North has taken a tinge of gloom from their stormy and inconstant skies; but the sunshine of the South scatters the mists in which spirits find their origin and their refuge. We recollect no instance in the Fabliaux, of any tale, in which such machinery as spectres or evil spirits are employed—and, in the prose romances of chivalry, only the adventure of the haunted chamber in Ysaie le Triste. In the early literature of Italy, the ghostly story of Nastagio in the Decameron is the first and almost the only instance of its occurrence; and that tale was not the invention of Boccaccio, but borrowed from the chronicle of a *monk* of the thirteenth century, named Helinandus.†

* * * * *

We must here close this sketch of the state of Spanish literature, antecedent to the age of Charles V. We have not attempted to treat the subject historically; because, in the absence of all early biography, any investigation as to the dates of particular poems is out of the question; and because the compositions of this whole era are connected by so many points of resemblance, and such a similarity of tone, that even if we possessed that information which is wanting, it would be impossible to present any definite notion of the characteristic differences of their authors. One or two names only, before the age of Juan II., have escaped oblivion; and, among the learned men and poets of his court, Juan de Mena is perhaps the only one who enjoys among the Spaniards any degree of reputation. But those who are acquainted with his *Labyrinto* will probably think that the praise he has received must have been accorded rather to the boldness of his design, than to the happiness of its execution. It is, like Fazio d' Uberti's "*Dettamondo*," a laborious imitation of the Divina Commedia, the most inimitable of poems; with some few passages of interest and beauty, amidst a profusion of pedantry and bad taste. But such productions do not properly fall under our general view of national poetry; and, we doubt not, our readers will readily dispense with an analysis which could not be relieved even by the variety of agreeable selection.

It is difficult to look back upon this early period of Spanish literature, without some melancholy recollections, and some gloomy anticipations. No where, perhaps, are the traces of the mutability of literature more strongly marked, or exhibited in more affecting colours. Centuries have already elapsed, since Arabia, that country that communicated to Spain and to Europe the stores of her vast knowledge, has relapsed into her primitive barbarism. The Arab again wanders, as rude as ever, over countries as wild as before. The colleges of Bagdad, of Balsora, and

† In addition to these interesting remarks on the Spanish ballads, and the causes in which they originated, the reviewer has given many brilliant examples, both in the original and translated. The limits to which this department of my work is confined prevent me from adding them to the foregoing essay, which reflects so much credit on the taste and erudition of the writer. (See pages 409—430.)

In the next Essay the same writer gives a copious account of the lyric poetry of Spain during the age of Charles V.

Sarmarcand, now appear only in fiction ; — the vast libraries of Arabian literature are only to be traced in the collections of the Escurial ; — and those poets who were once honoured with the title of Divine, are passed over in silence by D'Herbelot. Granada, on which the Arabians had lavished all the labours of art, now owes its beauties to nature alone ; — the site of the Albaycin is disputed ; the Generalife is a desert, and the Alhambra a ruin !

> " *Giace l'alta Cartago* — e appena i segni
> Dell' alte sue ruine il lido serba ;
> Muiono le città — muiono i regni,
> Copre i fasti e le pompe arena ed erba !"

The beautiful Provençal — the first-born of European languages, which had also imbibed, through its intercourse with Spain, the knowledge and refinement of the East, — after a blaze of three centuries, has expired. The language in which kings delighted to compose — in which Thibaut and Alphonso sung — and Cœur-de-Lion gave vent to his feelings in prison, has already become a dead language, a labour and a study ; — and its Troubadours, once so celebrated, are now known only by the voluminous industry of St. Palaye, and the eulogies of Dante and Petrarca. Over that period of Spanish literature which we have been considering the same obscurity has spread. Its poets, whose compositions are now read, admired, and commented on, have left behind them no trace to which the imagination can attach itself. They have " died, and made no sign." We pass from the infancy of Spanish poetry, to the age of Charles, as through a long vista of monuments without inscriptions, as the traveller approaches the noise and bustle of modern Rome through the lines of silent and unknown tombs that border the Appian Way. And who shall say how soon the same principle of mutability may render the fall of our literature, in its turn, a subject of regret and enquiry ; — how soon the philosopher may have to point out the operation of those principles, unseen by us, which have occasioned its decline ; — how soon the poet may collect and weep over its scattered fragments ; — and the antiquary speculate among the ruins of our palaces, as he now does in the silent chambers of the Alhambra, or the nameless temples of Palmyra or Persepolis !

SKETCH OF THE LYRIC POETRY OF SPAIN DURING THE AGE OF CHARLES THE FIFTH.*

An elegant translation of an elegant poet induces us to resume the subject of Spanish Literature, and to present, not a detailed account, but a rapid sketch, of the lyric poetry of Spain during the age of Charles V., a period which Spanish critics seem to consider as the golden age of their poetry. The remarkable feature of this period, is the decline of that old chivalrous poetry to which we had occasion lately to direct the attention of our readers, and the general introduction of the Italian taste.

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* 1. The Works of Garcilaso de la Vega. Translated into English verse, by J. H. Wiffen. 2. Floresta de Rimas Antiguas Castellanas. Por Böhl de Faber. — Vol. xl. p. 443. July, 1824.

Till the labours of Herder, Dieze, and other critics in Germany, had brought to light those rich collections of ballads in which the poetry of Spain abounds, foreigners seem scarcely to have been aware that there existed any thing like a poetical literature in Spain before Garcilaso. To them Spain seemed to have made her appearance at once in the field of letters and of European politics. They were acquainted with her literature, only after it had approximated so closely to the Italian as to render it no easy matter to point out a characteristic difference independently of language, and were ignorant of the remarkable phenomenon exhibited by the decline of a national literature, among a people peculiarly attached to old habits and associations, and the introduction of a foreign taste, opposed in almost every point to that which it supplanted. From the Spanish critics little information was to be derived. Their notices of their older poets and their productions, are given in the same brief, patronising style, in which, until lately, it was the custom for French critics to speak of their own poetry before the age of Louis XIV.: and the change from the old Castilian poetry to the Italian is generally mentioned as a matter of course — an exchange of rudeness for refinement — which almost necessarily took place as soon as a fair opportunity of comparison was afforded, by the temporary connection occasioned by the political relations of the two countries.

But the publication of the early monuments of Spanish poetry which the industry of modern critics has accumulated, while it has introduced juster views of the state of literature during that period which her national critics have passed over in silence, has tended materially to increase the difficulty of accounting for the decline of this captivating style of poetry, and the adoption of the Italian. Whatever may have been the opportunities of intercourse afforded by the wars of Charles, and whatever the talent of Boscan and Garcilaso, by whom the new system was first practised, it is difficult for us to ascribe to their individual efforts such a revolution, or to doubt that it had its origin in remoter and more general causes. Nor is it to be inferred that these had no existence, because they are little noticed by the critical historians of that period, who find a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon in the influence which a more artful and elaborate style of composition was likely to exert over a nation whose first forms of versification were of a ruder nature. It is probable, that we are, at the present day, more capable of appreciating the effect of such causes, than those who wrote at a period more nearly approaching to the events which they describe. Men have a tendency to over-rate the importance of events in which they have themselves participated, or which still operate on their minds by a kind of personal interest. To them, a small object in the foreground is sufficient to shut out miles of distance. The birth or death of a king — the loss or gaining of a battle — the opinions of some insulated critic — the labours of some favourite poet, magnified by their proximity, appear sufficient to account for revolutions which have in truth been the silent work of centuries. It is only when events have ceased to agitate with this personal feeling — when, at the distance of a century or two, they have all subsided into their proper position in the chain of causes, that we learn to appreciate their relative influence on literature, and to perceive, as we generally do, how powerless is any single event, or the efforts of any individual, to arrest or accelerate its course of progression or decay.

To enable us, then, to understand properly the extent of the change now introduced into Spanish literature, it is necessary to state briefly the

character of Italian poetry at this period, and the circumstances out of which it had originated.

In Italy, a number of causes had concurred to give to poetry a peculiar tone, to limit its objects, and to repress the developement of those feelings which give dignity and stability to national poetry; but, at the name time, to communicate, by these very restraints, a degree of polish and elegance, certainly far superior to any thing that had preceded them, and in itself not a little attractive and imposing. Amidst the general activity of intellect and fancy that accompanied the rise of chivalry, the descendants of the former masters of the world alone partook of no spark of the common enthusiasm. The wild romantic legends, and the heroic fictions, which elsewhere animated the courage and exalted the sentiments of Europe, though sufficiently known in Italy, are sought for in vain in its literature. A few passing allusions in Dante — an occasional adoption of some incident from the French romances in the Cento Novelle — a contemptuous expression in Petrarca, are almost the only traces to be met with; and it may certainly be said, that before the time of Zinabi or Pulci, these fictions had never exercised any influence on the literature of Italy.

This might be owing to many causes. Agitated by intestine tumults, or overrun by foreign enemies, the various provinces of Italy were united by no connecting link. Since the removal of the empire to Constantinople, her history had been little but a record of disasters. There were no national and brilliant recollections, therefore, to which, as to a bond of fellowship, the inhabitants of her scattered states might appeal; and that mercantile and commercial spirit * which even at this period prevailed in every province where war allowed some intervals of repose, seemed to have quenched for ever the sparks of national enthusiasm.

But the evil did not terminate here. States originally despotic became gradually more so; and, even in those which still retained the name of republican, the subjects found they had only exchanged one tyrant for many. It is true that, among the petty sovereigns of Italy, there were some that affected to patronise and encourage literature. Even among the families of Sforza, Visconti, Gonzaga, Scala, and "the antique brood of Este," those turbulent spirits whose names are associated with ideas of rudeness and ferocity, a desire to add the lustre of learning to the splendour of a military reputation is occasionally visible. But what one sovereign cultivated, his successor frequently laboured to suppress; and literature, to maintain its ground, requires some steady and systematic support, independent of the caprice of individuals. On the whole, therefore, its vigour declined during these fitful alternations of storm and sunshine. A check had been given to free discussion and to moral energy, and its effects were speedily visible on literature. Music and painting indeed continued to flourish; for it seems to be of their nature to flourish under any government. Deriving but little impulse from public opinion, they exercise on it in turn but a feeble action; nor is it perhaps too much to say, that no great or abiding emotion was ever yet produced by the sight of a painting, or the sound of a strain of music. Hence they excite little attention and jealousy even in the most arbitrary states; nay, it is probable they may rather be regarded with a friendly eye. There is a species of contemplative idleness and passive enjoyment of the present, with an indifference to the future, connected with the indulgence of these fas-

* This is peculiarly visible in the Decameron, the spirit of which, like that of the Arabian Tales, is entirely commercial.

cinating pursuits, which, on the whole, harmonises better with the stillness of despotism, than with the stir and activity of the popular forms of government. But the higher branches of philosophy and eloquence — the science that investigates principles, and the art that clothes them with a splendid colouring — were almost annihilated by the vigilance of the Italian princes. Philosophy was confined to the discussion of points that bore not the remotest relation to the business of life; and these dicussions, unimportant as they now appear, were characterised by a disgraceful ferocity of personal invective, which can only be believed by those who have looked into the letters of Filelfo and Poggio. Eloquence was employed in multiplying *Novelle* — imitations of the Decameron, which surpassed the original in licentiousness as much as they fell short of it in feeling and beauty. Poetry, again, which seems to hold a middle rank between the passive and sensual tendencies of the arts, and the intellectual activity which is the essence of philosophy and eloquence, partook of the general restraint which fettered the imagination, and the consequent tendency to quiet and thoughtless enjoyment. The great mind of Dante had indeed outstripped the spirit of his age; but his inspiration was personal; and perhaps no poet of such distinguished talent ever exercised less influence on the literature of his country. The stern vigour and vehemence of his sentiments — the masterly boldness which sketches a portrait in a single line — the carelessness of petty beauties — the sublime reach of invention, which distinguished the Divina Commedia, had expired with its author; and the true spirit of the fifteenth century must be traced in its diffuse and feeble lyrics. Where the poet is sensible that there exists no unity of feeling among his countrymen, he naturally adopts the lyric form — the expression of individual feeling. His own mind, too, insensibly takes a colour from surrounding circumstances; his first ebullitions of feeling grow tamer; he learns to suppress those strains which find no echo in the bosoms of his countrymen; and at last confines himself to those safe topics on which all are permitted to expatiate.

Hence we may explain something of that monotonous and languid eloquence which pervades the Italian poetry of the fifteenth century. Excluded from the use of national traditions by that wretched system of subdivision which has doomed Italy "per servir sempre, o vincitrice o vinta;" — barred from all themes connected with Roman glory by the misgovernment of sovereigns, who, knowing the transitory nature of their power, used it with a greater harshness, Poetry turned her attention to themes which could excite no jealousy or distrust — to the complaints or triumphs of love — to the celebration of the delights of a pastoral life — to the delineation of a world of magic and enchantment — to the unrestrained indulgence of a vein of buffoonery, which delighted in dispelling the illusions of Romance, by coupling them with low or ludicrous imagery — to all, in short, which was most remote from the existing state of things. The elaborate Sonnet, the artificial Canzone, the intricate Sestina, — sufficient alone to have chilled the flow of lyrical inspiration — harmonised well with sentiments as artificial as themselves. Every thing took a tone of listlessness and luxurious ease — an air of composed melancholy, or quiet Epicurean enjoyment, that seemed to lull emotion to rest, and blend, in equal forgetfulness, the senses and the soul.

Yet this very limitation of the efforts of poetry to one class of subjects, —this studious exclusion of themes of more national and warmer interest, must be admitted to have given to the amatory and pastoral poetry of Italy a degree of perfection unequalled by that of any other nation. The

love-verses of Petrarch, of Giusto da Conti, of Bembo, Lorenzo de' Medici, Politian, and Sannazzaro, are models of elegance and refinement; and calculated, beyond doubt, to exercise a considerable influence on the taste of any nation, whose poetry was of a less ornate and elaborate kind. Borrowing from the Troubadours the harmonious intricacy of the canzone, and from the Sicilians the form of the sonnet, they had eclipsed and cast into the shade the sources from which they had obtained them. It is an easy task to point out their conceits and affectation; but who can be insensible, at the same time, to their exquisite imagination — the refinement of their sentiments — the beauty of their pastoral pictures — the classic air that pervades their eclogues — or the delicious harmony of their choruses, that float around us like lyrical voices heard in the air? It is but a slender boast, perhaps, for a nation, that she has carried to its perfection the poetry of the senses; but never, before or since, has it been dignified by so much genius, or allied to so many tender and amiable sentiments, or embalmed in such a stream of sweetness and melody.

Such appears to have been the general character of Italian poetry during the latter part of the fourteenth and the whole of the fifteenth century; and those who recollect the nature of the original romantic poetry of Spain will perceive, that it was opposed to the spirit of the Italian in almost all its leading features. The very essence of Spanish poetry was activity — that of the Italian repose. The former had devoted its strains to the celebration of the national glories, and presented, only in a more dignified shape, events which really adorned its annals; in the latter, patriotism seemed to have expired with Dante and Petrarca *, and all allusions to national events were scrupulously avoided. Hence the character of Spanish poetry, with all its occasional Orientalism, was natural; for it was the poetry of life and action; — that of the Italian, occupied with an ideal world and imaginary Arcadia, was contemplative, dreamy, and unsubstantial.

From what causes, then, did it arise, that the reign of Charles V. should be remarkable for the decline of the old chivalrous taste in Spain, and the adoption of a system so different as the Italian? Did it arise entirely from the influence of the superior polish and perfection of Italian versification, as displayed in the works of Boscan and Garcilaso; or was it rather the gradual result of other principles, more remote in their origin, and more general in their operation?

We confess we lean to the latter opinion. We are persuaded that the superior polish of the Italian poetry never could have impressed the Castilians with an idea of the rudeness of their own, had the national character remained the same. It is a mistake, in the first place, to suppose that the character of Italian poetry was unknown in Spain till the wars of Charles in Italy, and the publication of the works of Boscan. Specimens of the Italian *endecasyllabic* verse occur even in the Count-Lucanor of Juan Manuel, as early as 1362; and it was evidently familiar to the Marquis of Santillana †, who, before 1458, had published about forty sonnets

* Even theirs is of a suspicious cast. Dante was evidently more a Ghibelline than an Italian; and Petrarch's patriotism evaporated in a single canzone, and a foolish admiration of the insane schemes of Cola de Rienzi.

† In his letter to the Constable Don Pedro, he talks of Italian poetry as well known, and mentions his reasons for preferring it in some points to the French. He mentions also, that the eleven-syllable measure, which the Italians themselves had borrowed from the Provençals, was commonly used for centuries before by the Valentians and Catalans.

in the Italian style, which occur in the *Cancionero* of Argote de Molina. But though recommended by the talents of such men, the innovation did not then succeed, because it was opposed to the general feeling of the people. It may be said, perhaps, that Boscan was a man of greater talents than Manuel or Santillana, and that its ultimate success was owing to this circumstance. But without meaning to underrate the talents of Boscan and Garcilaso, there are many things, we think, that show that such a general movement as took place in Spain during the sixteenth century, was not owing to the labours of any individual poet. Poets, in fact, are seldom so far in advance of the opinions of their age as is believed. It is true that, in the earliest periods of a national literature, the influence of individual talent is generally more visible than the influence of the spirit of the age on that individual; but as the circumstances which render poets a peculiar class alter with the progress of society, the latter influence gradually becomes the strongest; and in advanced periods of civilisation, even the most original poets content themselves with stamping the character of the age upon their works, instead of endeavouring to communicate, from the superiority of their own minds, a new direction to national propensities. Now, in Spain, those circumstances that tend to insulate men of genius, and to separate the spirit of society from individual inspiration, had never existed at all — partly from the universal diffusion of intelligence, which, at a peculiarly early period, had resulted from the connection with Arabia; and partly from the character of Spanish poetry, which, as it was in its nature essentially popular, partook from the first of all the variations of popular opinion.

We shall find it more difficult to ascribe the revolution in taste, of which we are now speaking, to the influence of the two poets we have mentioned, when we consider the character of their genius, which had nothing in it of an inventive or creative cast, and seemed fitted only to improve on the ideas that had been suggested by the more active imagination of others. Men of taste and refinement they undoubtedly were; but it is not by mere men of taste that the ancient habits and cherished associations of centuries are altered, and the canons of a national literature subverted and overthrown. Such events have their origin in deeper causes; and those poets in whom the innovation first appears will generally be found to have only concentrated and systematised opinions which were already floating on the surface of society. Accordingly, when we look to the history of Spain, we shall see that her national character had been silently undergoing a complete change since the era to which her romantic poetry belongs, under the operation of new political relations, new principles of government, and new views of religious toleration.

The struggle between Arabia and Spain, after fluctuating for five centuries, began, towards the commencement of the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic, to draw to a crisis. The tide of conquest had been for some time before gradually retreating to the eastward. Leon and Castile, after long wasting their strength in fruitless rivalry, became united in the persons of Ferdinand and Isabella; and Granada, the last possession of the Arabs, submitted to their arms in 1492. The same year witnessed the discovery of those vast countries on the other side of the Atlantic, which at first seemed to promise to Spain the possession of inexhaustible treasures. Navarre was added in 1512. The accession of Charles V., the possessor of the Netherlands, of the imperial crown, and the dominions inherited from Maximilian, completed that enormous accumulation of territory, which, in the course of half a century, raised Spain from an unknown and insignificant state to the proudest rank among the kingdoms of Europe.

Possessed of a power more extensive than any that had been witnessed in Europe since the days of Charlemagne, it is not surprising that Charles should have indulged in dreams of universal conquest, or that his subjects should have fallen into the same delirium. The brilliancy of his first campaigns served to confirm these anticipations, and to create and sustain in the mind of the Spanish people an insatiable ambition, and a diseased appetite for military glory. It was to the career of arms that all talent now looked forward for its reward; — to *that* the energy and constancy of Spanish character were devoted, and, in the hope of rendering the name of Spain illustrious, the Spanish soldier sacrificed (as he thought for a time) his personal freedom, and seemed to feel the same pride in passive obedience, which he had been accustomed to do in the consciousness of independence. Whatever courage, perseverance, or discipline could perform, the warriors of Charles undertook and accomplished; wherever the voice of their leader called them— to toil, or danger, or death — we find them still yielding the same unshaken, unmurmuring obedience.

This is the bright side of the picture; and doubtless there is, at first sight, something imposing in this altered state of Spanish character. There is something that appeals to the imagination, if not to reason, in that unquestioning devotion which courted dangers, and privations, and toils; that bastard patriotism which led the Spanish soldiery to forget even the interests of liberty, in the desire of aggrandising their country, — and to cherish the recollection or anticipation of her greatness, in the wildest and most distant of those regions where she had sent them to conquer — or, perhaps, to die. We are ready to imagine, that the same grandeur of thought was conspicuous in other parts of their character, and yield reluctantly to the belief which is forced upon us by the history of this period — that the perfection of military virtue was united with almost every moral vice, with the most deliberate treachery, and the most unrelenting cruelty. But the fact cannot be disguised. The noblest warriors of the sixteenth century were not more terrible for their prowess than their crimes; and if, as Sismondi says, they presented to the enemy a front of iron, they presented to the unfortunate an iron heart.

It may be asked, why we attribute such demoralising effects to the wars of Charles, while we ascribe to the more protracted struggle with Arabia so different a result? But there were striking distinctions in the character of these contests. It is true, that the effects of war on national character can never be in themselves favourable. Those sacrifices of principle to situation, and that confinement of every thing within the pale of military duty which it exacts — that submissive apathy which it dignifies with the name of discipline — that callousness of feeling which it tends to foster — are always prejudicial to the character of a nation, unless they are counteracted by some strong principle of generous and amiable feeling. But the precise degree in which they operate depends materially upon particular circumstances. A contest which unites all hearts — which animates the exertions of the soldier as well as the leader — which is connected with principles of lofty feeling, instead of mere calculations of interest or territorial accession, has always in itself a counteracting principle, which neutralises, in some measure, the evil consequences of war. An additional check is furnished, when, in addition to the noble character of the end in view, long intercourse has taught the contending parties to respect each other, and fostered a romantic connection, and cemented private attachments in the midst of public opposition. Both these are to be found in the warfare with Arabia. But the

campaigns of Charles contemplated only the acquisition of territory. They had no connection with that enthusiasm of religion and patriotism which gives to every one engaged a proud consciousness of individual importance. They were diversified and softened by none of those peaceful interludes that relieve the tragedy of war. Strangers among strangers, the Spaniards could cultivate no intercourse with the nations to which they were opposed; and thus, in Europe or America — among Protestants or Catholics — in Germany, or at the sack of Rome — they preserved the same inflexible pride, and the same undistinguishing ferocity. Add to this, the decay of that chivalrous spirit, which had been mainly supported by the irregular nature of military tactics, and the opportunities thus afforded for feats of individual heroism. The use of gunpowder had become general by the time of Charles V.; and the consequences which Ariosto had foreseen * had already become evident.

Other elements were united with this military spirit in deteriorating the Spanish character. While threatening or destroying the liberties of other nations, they had been insensible to the gradual decline of their own, amidst the confusion of attack, the excitation of victory, and that privileged dictatorship which is occasioned by the necessities of war. The immense enlargement of the Spanish dominions had also been unfavourable to the preservation of the proper balance of power in the state. While Spain continued an insulated kingdom, the nobles, the guardians of the national privileges, had felt themselves almost on an equality with their king, and with the inclination, had also the power, of confining, within its proper boundary, the powers of monarchy; but when the immense dominions of Germany, Holland, and part of Italy, were added, Spain became only a small item in the list of his possessions, and the power of the nobility shrunk into nothing, compared with that of a prince who could range under his standard the troops of the greater part of Europe. It then became necessary for the nobles to preserve, by submission, the dignity they could no longer maintain by resistance; and thus the same anxiety to support their own importance, which in one state of society had been the means of securing the national liberties, became, by a change of circumstances, one of the strongest props of arbitrary power.

Last came the influence of the Inquisition. This terrible tribunal had been established in 1478 by Ferdinand and Isabella, and had scarcely reached, during the reign of Charles, its maturity of guilt. It seems undeniable, indeed, that, even before the foundation of the Inquisition, the Spanish character was tinctured with fanaticism in a considerable degree; and perhaps its institution was at first in unison with the spirit of the nation. But, though levelled ostensibly against heresy in religion, its real sphere of action was far more comprehensive; and it is probable, indeed, that the crafty Ferdinand would never have consented to its establishment, had not he foreseen that it might be rendered as effectual a check upon political as religious heterodoxy. To those who have been accustomed to observe by what secret but strong ties all the powers of mind are bound together, — and how surely even the subtle movements of the

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* When Orlando throws Cymosco's gun into the sea: —

" Lo tolse e disse — Perche più non stia
Mai cávalier per te d'essere ardito,
Ne quanto il buon val, mai più si vanti
Il rio per te valer, — quì giù rimanti." — C. 9

imagination are affected by the restraint of the sterner faculties, it will be evident how unfavourable such an institution must have been to the spirit of poetry.

Thus, then, had the Spanish character, by the operation of these concurring causes, been gradually assimilating, in many important points, to the Italian. The causes which, in the one country, had fettered the progress of intellect, and lulled the imagination into an Arcadian repose, had, in the other, prepared the way for the introduction of a similar taste, by destroying the relish for those older strains which were no longer in unison with the change of feelings, and gradually withdrawing the attention of Poetry from the affairs of actual life, which she could no longer look upon without disgust, or censure without danger. How else could it happen, that, amidst an age of great events—sudden and fearful catastrophes—revolutions of empires and opinions—of all that is calculated to sublimate the imagination, and to awaken strains of indignation or triumph, the Spanish Muse should have exchanged her ancient lyre for the lute, and sung only the strains of love or pastoral idleness?—That, with a new world opened to Spanish discovery abroad—the Moors expelled at home—France defeated at Parma and Pavia, and her monarch a captive in Madrid—the Ottoman power humbled in Hungary and Tunis, and her fleets whelmed in the waters of Lepanto—Portugal, in her turn, falling at Alcazar—the Church torn by the reformation of Luther—Imperial Rome sacked by an apostate Bourbon, and all Europe agitated by civil wars and religious dissensions—the influence of these mighty changes on Spanish poetry should be traced only in three of Herrera's Odes, some uninteresting Epistles, and in the pages of some dead and forgotten Epics? How strange does it at first appear, to find the greatest of the Spanish poets, who were themselves engaged in these tumultuous scenes, passing over in silence the record of their dangers and their victories, and even, in eulogising the character of Alva, celebrating, not his military prowess, but that patronage and love of literature which, by a strange inconsistency, was united with cruelty in his character![*] But when we reflect what were the crimes that sullied the glory of these wars, and neutralised their poetical and inspiring tendencies—and think of those causes which checked the free exercise of thought and expression—we shall understand and approve that feeling of the Spanish poets, which refused at least to celebrate, what it was not permitted to censure, and sought a refuge from the realities of life in the innocent delights of an ideal Arcadia. Viewed in this light, the gentle melancholy

* This union of elegant taste with ferocity of conduct, which is conspicuous in Alva, and to a less extent in Mendoza, is less uncommon than might at first be imagined; and the annals of France and Italy, during the two centuries that preceded this period, furnish some striking proofs, that Horace's remark, "Ingenuas didicisse," &c. is not of universal application. Charles of Anjou, the tyrant of Naples, and the murderer of Conradin, was a poet; and amatory verses of his, in the *langue d'oil*, still exist in the Royal Library at Paris. Folquet, Bishop of Thoulouse, one of the most odious wretches of his age, was a Troubadour and a poet. Filippo Maria, the last of the Visconti, and Francisco Sforza of Milan, men of blood and outrage, surrounded themselves with a court of learned men. Even the gloomy Philip II. amidst the various affairs of importance which engaged him on his entrance into Portugal, is said, by Faria y Souza, to have enquired with eagerness for Camoens, and to have been sensibly affected, by hearing that all that remained of that great poet was the epitaph in the church of Santa Anna, which, to the disgrace of his country, commemorates that "he lived poor and miserable—and so he died!".

spirit which pervades the poetry of Garcilaso and his contemporaries, such as Boscan, Montemayor, and Mendoza, soldiers like himself, and habitually conversant with scenes little calculated to soften the heart, or awaken the finer sensibilities of our nature, becomes delightful. Doubtless there appears some inconsistency in this union of practical ferocity with theoretical innocence; nor is it easy to conceive how the Spanish poets could thus reconcile war and peace, and trace, as it were, their pastoral verses on the green turf with the point of their swords. But there is still something of a redeeming quality in this sensibility to the beauty of goodness. It is the expression of that homage which the heart pays to nature whenever it yields itself to the pure influences of poetry; and when we find even the stern Mendoza, the "*Tyrant of Sienna,*" in his Epistles to Boscan and Zuniga, breathing out his wishes for solitude and domestic happiness, and returning still unsophisticated to the first impulses of natural emotion, we think of the favourite of Shah Abbas, who, even in the height of his prosperity, continued to visit in secret the cloak, the crook, and the shepherd's pipe, which he had handled in days less brilliant, but not less happy.

We are not writing a history of Spanish poetry; nor is it our intention to particularise the poets of the age of Charles V. The slight distinctions which separate them from each other, and the minor points of versification and expression, can never be properly appreciated by foreigners. We wish only to throw out some general views of the state of poetry at this period, and of the causes in which its peculiarities originated, and to illustrate these by a few specimens from those poets who may be considered as occupying the highest rank in the departments which they chose for themselves. The general tone of the poetry of this period is so decidedly pastoral, that, in a *coup d'œil* of this kind, it might be unnecessary to exhibit any specimens from other departments, were it not that the few we do possess in the heroic, and the moral and religious lyric, though they can be regarded only as exceptions to the prevailing character of the age, are of uncommon excellence;—and in pastoral poetry there is so much sameness and monotony of imagery and sentiment—so much of a conventional cast in which all poets agree, that the character of a very large mass may be completely appreciated from a very few specimens.

In adopting the Italian versification and the Italian taste in the pastoral and amatory lyric, the Spanish poets had never been able to divest themselves of that taint of exaggeration which their early intercourse with the East had communicated to them, or at least increased.* Hence, if there is any prominent distinction between the poetry of the two countries at this period, it arises from this. The Spanish poets have more warmth, but less taste; and, while they are frequently more natural, they are generally deficient in that delicacy of thought and expression which is so eminently the characteristic of the Italians. Something of the old leaven of impetuosity and hyperbole adheres to all of them, perhaps, except Garcilaso; and hence, though undoubtedly at the head of the pastoral poets of Spain, he is by no means the most perfect

* Something of the same fault seems to have adhered to the Spanish writers even in the days of Roman literature. Quinctilian, speaking of the superiority of their imagination to their taste, says, "Velles eos *suo* ingenio scripsisse, *alieno* judicio."

representation of the general tone of the poetry of the age. In this respect Boscan, Montemayor, and Saa de Miranda, may be said to embody more accurately the national feeling. Boscan, in particular, who preceded Garcilaso in the use of the Italian measures, though he studied with the greatest care the poetry of Petrarch, Bembo, Sannazzaro, Politian, and Bernardo Tasso*, never could acquire their elegance of taste, or divest himself of the national tendency to Orientalism. There are passages, no doubt, in his "Claros y frescos rios," which have a truth and nature about them not often to be found in Italian poetry. But wherever he attempted to rival the neatness of Petrarca, he failed.† Montemayor, again, exhibits a strange union, or rather contest, of the two styles. In his *Diana* he was perpetually blending them; and while the *fond* of his work is evidently from the Italian and Greek Romances, and many specimens of the Canzone, Sestina, Sonnet, and those triple rhymes (*esdrujolos*) which he had borrowed from the *Arcadia*, occur, yet nearly an equal number of the poems interspersed through that work are *redondillas* and *chanzonetas*, in the old national style, and full of that despairing energy which distinguishes the pieces in the *Cancioneros*.

In Garcilaso, however, the Italian poets found arival, and, we are inclined to think, a superior; for if the charge of exaggeration applies to the Spanish poets, that of unnatural subtlety is not less applicable to the Italian. The enthusiastic study of the Grecian philosophy in Italy, and particularly of the writings of the later Platonists, had, at an early period, introduced a metaphysical and reasoning style in subjects where it was peculiarly out of place. Poetry deals only with obvious relations and differences; and whenever it has recourse to distant and far-fetched resemblances, or shadowy distinctions, it trenches on the provinces of wit or philosophy. Garcilaso, however, contrived so finely to temper the subtlety of Italian taste with the impetuosity of the Spanish, that the result is superior to any thing to be found in his models. He has written but a few Odes, Eclogues, and Sonnets; and yet he is justly regarded as the first of Spanish classical poets, and his verses pass from mouth to mouth as proverbs among his countrymen.

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* Mr. Wiffen enumerates Tansillo among the Italian poets whose fame gave an impulse to the taste of Garcilaso. We rather think that this is a mistake. Garcilaso had certainly written many of his compositions before 1530, and Tansillo had written nothing before 1534, in the autumn of which year he acquired a disgraceful notoriety by the publication of his *Vendemmiatore*. But his Sonnets, his Canzoni, and his Lagrime di' San Pietro, which alone were likely to have been congenial to the pure taste of the Spanish poet, did not appear till after his death.

† One instance will give an idea of this. Petrarch, in one of his Sonnets (LXIX.), speaking of the impression left by the beauty of Laura, even after her charms were beginning to decay, says,

"Piaga per allentar d'arco non sana."

"The wound does not heal, though the bow is relaxed."

This truism, which pleases in one line, is thus absurdly expanded by Boscan, and applied to the case of Absence: —

"No sanan las heridas en el dadas;
Aunque cese el mirar que las causó
Se quedan en el alma confirmadas—
Que se uno esta con muchas cuchilladas
Porque huya de quien le acuchilló
No por esto seran' mejor curadas."

Obras de Boscan y Alg. de Garcilaso, p. 52.

His fame chiefly rests, however, on his first Eclogue, and his Ode "A la Flor de Guido." Garcilaso, whose character in some points bears a striking resemblance to that of Virgil, seemed to have caught a double portion of his spirit while lingering near that Parthenope, which the Roman regarded with such peculiar affection; and this first and finest of his Eclogues was produced at Naples. The plan is as simple as possible. Two shepherds, Salicio and Nemoroso (in whom he is supposed to have figured himself and his friend Boscan), alternately give vent to their feelings in melancholy strains. The subject of the first is the infidelity,—of the second, the death, of a mistress; and it is difficult to say to which the preference ought to be given. The classical reader will at every turn recognise resemblances to the Latin poets: but Garcilaso possessed the talent of introducing these imitations so admirably, that in general the knowledge that they are imitations rather increases than diminishes our sense of the talent of the poet; and in this Eclogue they are so happily interwoven with the romantic texture of the poem, that they seem rather to receive than to give ornament. This Eclogue has been translated with peculiar beauty by Mr. Wiffen, whose elegant volume must be regarded as a great acquisition to the Spanish scholar. His translations uniformly rise with the subject; and he has shown very considerable dexterity in rendering with fidelity, yet in an improved shape, some of those prosing passages which occur here and there in many of Garcilaso's poems.†

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We have stated the causes which appear to us to have led the Spanish poets into an ideal world, and banished almost entirely the inspiration which is derived from contemporary events; and the few exceptions to this which occur in the odes of Herrera, will be found, we believe, to confirm the view which we have adopted. For the events which are the subject of his odes are precisely those to which, amidst the gloom of wars which all the splendour of success could not brighten, and of persecutions which all the sophistry of superstition and bigotry could not palliate or disguise, the mind of a poet could turn with feelings of unqualified exultation or majestic sorrow, unmingled with shame: — the triumph of religion and the liberation of many thousand Christian captives at Lepanto—and the fatal defeat of Sebastian, in his expedition to Africa, at Alcazar. Of all the Spanish poets, Herrera possesses the loftiest and most elevated style of expression; and in compositions where the dignity of the subject authorised a corresponding pomp of expression, he was eminently successful. Like the Italian poet Filicaja, his mind was deeply imbued with the beauties of the Sacred Writings; and in these odes he introduces many of those sublime and terrible images from the prophetic writers, which give such a peculiar majesty and charm to Filicaja's Canzone on the siege of Vienna and that addressed to John Sobieski. There is a striking resemblance between the tone of these canzoni and those of Herrera, arising undoubtedly, in some measure, from the similarity of the subjects, both of which are commemorative of the truimph of the Cross over the Crescent; but owing, in a still greater degree, to a

† I have not room for any of the specimens of Spanish poetry with which the reviewer has enriched his Essay. (See Stanzas from Garcilaso's Lament of Salicio, Vol. xl. p. 457.; and from that of Nemoroso, p. 459. Sannazzaro's Eclogue, addressed by Ergasto to the tomb of Androgeus, p. 461.; Montemayor, Serena addressing a lock of Diana's hair, p. 463.)

similarity of genius between the poets. On the whole, however, Herrera is inferior to the Italian; for the canzoni of the Spanish poet generally owe their beauties more to the innate grandeur of the subject than to the characteristic feeling of the writer; and his sonnets are, almost without exception, laboured and affected; while Filicaja poured over all his lyrical poems a melancholy tenderness, which renders even his most trifling compositions interesting and affecting.†

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The greatest of the Spanish poets of this age, and perhaps one of the noblest lyric poets that ever existed, yet remains to be noticed. While he stands alone among his countrymen of this period in the character of his inspiration, the influence of the spirit of the age is still visible in the absence of every thing that betrays any extensive acquaintance or sympathy with actual life. That relief, which other poets sought in the scenery of an imaginary Arcadia, Luis Ponce de Leon, bred in the silence and solitude of the cloister, found in the contemplation of the divine mysteries, and in the indulgence of those rapturous feelings which it is the tendency of Catholicism to create. His mind, naturally gentle and composed, avoided the shock of polemical warfare, and seems to have been in no degree tinctured with that fanaticism which characterises his brethren. Hence it was to the delights, rather than to the terrors, of religion, that he turned his attention. A profound scholar, and deeply versed in the Grecian philosophy, he had "unsphered the spirit of Plato," and embodied in his poetry the lofty views of the Greek philosopher, with regard to the original derivation of the soul from a higher existence, but heightened and rendered more distinct and more deeply interesting by the Christian belief, that such was also to be its final destination. Separated from a world of which he knew neither the evil nor the good, his thoughts had wandered so habitually "beyond the visible diurnal sphere," that to him the realities of life had become as visions, the ideal world of his own imagination had assumed the consistency of reality. His whole life looks like a religious reverie, a philosophic dream, which was no more disturbed by trials and persecutions from without, than the visions of the sleeper are influenced by the external world by which he is surrounded. ‡

The character of Luis de Leon is distinguished by another peculiarity. It might naturally be expected that, with this tendency to mysticism in his ideas, his works would be tinctured with vagueness and obscurity of expression; but no poet ever appears to have subjected the creations of an enthusiastic imagination more strictly to the ordeal of a severer and critical taste, or to have imparted to the language of rapture so deep an air of truth and reality. While he had thoroughly imbued himself with the lofty idealism of the Platonic philosophy, he exhibits in his style all the clearness and precision of Horace; and, with the exception of Testi

† I must refer the reader to the Review for the noble ode which follows, on Sebastian's defeat, translated by Mrs. Hemans, p. 465—467.

‡ He was confined for five years in the Inquisition, without seeing the light of day, for venturing to translate into Spanish the Song of Solomon, contrary to the prohibitory law, that no part of the Bible should be translated into the vulgar tongue. He bore his imprisonment with the utmost calmness and resignation; and when he was at last released, and restored to his theological chair, he never alluded to his imprisonment. An immense crowd had assembled to hear his re-opening lecture; but Luis de Leon, as if no such melancholy interval had taken place, resumed his subject with the usual formula, "*Heri dicebamus*," &c.

among the Italians †, is certainly the only modern who has caught the true spirit of the Epicurean poet. In the sententious gravity of his style he resembles him very closely. But the Moral Odes of Luis de Leon "have a spell beyond" the Lyrics of Horace. That philosophy of indolence which the Roman professed, which looks on life only as a visionary pageant, and death as the deeper and sounder sleep that succeeds the dream, — which places the idea of happiness in passive existence, and parts with indifference from love and friendship — from liberty — from life itself, whenever it costs an effort to retain them, is allied to a principle of universal *mediocrity*, which is destructive of all lofty views, and, when minutely examined, is even inconsistent with those qualified principles of morality which it nominally professes and prescribes. But in the odes of Luis de Leon, we recognise the influence of a more animating and ennobling feeling. He looked upon the world,

. . . "esta lisongera
Vida con cuanto teme, y cuanto espera,"

with calmness, but not with apathy or selfishness. The shortness of life, the flight of time, the fading of flowers, the silent swiftness of the river, the decay of happiness, the mutability of fortune, — the ideas and images, which to the Epicurean poet only afford inducements to devote the present hour to enjoyment, are those which the Spanish moralist holds out as incitements to the cultivation of that enthusiasm, which alone appeared to him capable of fully exercising the powers of the soul, or disengaging it from the influence of worldly feelings, and elevating it to that heaven, from which it had its birth. ‡

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Such are some of the great men who, during the age of Charles, effected a revolution in Spanish taste; and such the character of that period, which is still considered by the Spanish critics as the golden age of their poetry. We confess we are inclined to question whether this epithet ought to be taken in the same extended sense in which it is used by Spanish writers. That the lyrical compositions of Garcilaso and some of his contemporaries were superior to any single production that had preceded them, with the exception, perhaps, of Manrique's poem on the death of his father, is no doubt true; but that the poetry of the age, taken as a whole, is to be considered superior to that of any which preceded it, appears to us a more questionable proposition. To appreciate properly the spirit of the romantic poetry, we must peruse its numerous collections of legendary ballads, and take into view the general diffusion of poetical and exalted feeling. The more extensive our acquaintance is with these productions, the higher will be our estimate of Spanish character and genius at that period. On the contrary, *he* will entertain the highest opinion of the poetry of the age of Charles, who confines himself to a *few* specimens selected from *Anthologies* and *Floreste*. That mellifluous

† We think it is evident that Testi was largely indebted to the Spanish poet. The resemblances between Luis de Leon's ode addressed to Felipe Ruiz, "Cuando sera que puedo," and Testi's canzone to Virginio Cesarini, "Armai d' arco sonoro," and between Leon's "No siempre es poderosa" addressed to Carrera, and Testi's ode to Montecuculli, "Ruscelletto orgoglioso," are too close to be accidental. The allusion to Typheus is expressed by both nearly in the same terms, in these latter poems.

‡ Two splendid odes of Luis de Leon, which the critic has translated, will be found in pages 470—473.

softness of expression which is at first so agreeable, palls on the mind; that limited range of imagery and thought which pastoral poetry admits of, becomes monotonous; and above all, that extreme delicacy, which, when it is systematically attempted, is perhaps the most trying test of poetical tact, becomes intolerable when produced at second hand by a host of imitated imitators. If we consult our general impressions, the poets of this period leave no strong traces on the mind; they fill our memories with no splendid passages; they animate us by no spirit-stirring appeals; they present us with little that speaks to the heart, or comes home to the business of life; — but they soothe us into an intoxicating Sybaritic softness; they give dignity to indolence; and they please by a gentleness and melancholy, which, without questioning too minutely their reality, we love to contrast with the stormy agitation of the period which gave them birth.

But the real defects of this style of poetry are most visible when we extend our views a little beyond the reign of Charles V. When, instead of a world purely ideal, nature itself, as displayed in the actual passions, and feelings, and interests of men, forms the general subject of the labours of the poet, however much the public taste may for a short time be led astray by the influence of any one individual, it seldom fails to be led back into the path of good taste and natural feeling. But when moral and political errors have led men to abandon entirely the realities of life as a source of inspiration — to create a world of their own — to invent imaginary characters, incidents, sentiments, and language, this rectifying standard of Nature can no longer be resorted to; and when, in the natural and almost inevitable progress of things, that peculiar style of poetry begins to be tainted with exaggeration and bad taste, it generally "falls like Lucifer — never to rise again." The natural tone which Garcilaso and his contemporaries contrived to blend even with the most ideal of their conceptions, as it depended solely on their own good taste, was soon forgotten, when their school of poetry began, like every other, to be corrupted by ambitious improvers. Succeeding poets carried the principle, which they had confined to the choice of their subjects, into all the minutiæ of imagery and expression; till at last every sentence became an enigma, and every epithet was distorted as much as possible from the purposes to which it was commonly applied. Hence, the corruption of taste which soon after followed was no unnatural sequence of the style of poetry of this period, pure and classical as it appears.

The military and literary glory of Charles V. is, after all, but a specious illusion. The victories of Pavia, of Tunis and Lepanto, were the precursors of the defeat of the Armada, and the mortifying reverses in the Netherlands; and Garcilaso was but the herald of Gongora and Quevedo, The reign of Charles had fostered a system of cruelty and treachery abroad — an indifference to liberty and principle at home — and gradually undermined those sound principles of thought and action, with which, by some mysterious connection, the sources of good taste seem to be allied. If, for a time, the evil principles, which it had engendered or increased, were concealed by the imposing brilliancy of undeserved success, their real effects became visible in the next century, when we see Spain experiencing the most mortifying reverses, — acknowledging, when it was too late, the value of those early principles which she had been labouring too successfully to destroy, — contemplating at once the decline of her literary and political ascendancy, — and sitting, like Marius in Carthage, a ruin among the ruins she had made.

ANCIENT GERMAN AND NORTHERN POETRY.*

THE study of the ancient poetry of the North has now become a favourite pursuit in Germany. Whilst the Germans were groaning under their foreign taskmasters, their laws, their customs, and their very language, were threatened with extinction. Their common sufferings, as well as their late unexampled successes, have roused the dormant spirit of German patriotism. They have become conscious of the innate worth and might of their nation, and have begun to prize whatever is peculiar to it with enthusiastic fondness. This effervescent nationality is, perhaps, at present a too little impetuous; but it has had the good effect of restoring their long-forgotten bards, as well as the romantic legends of the olden day, to their former popularity: and a kind of poetical accomplishment has thus been given to the old prophecy, that Ariovistus and Wittekind, and the invulnerable Siegfried would issue once more from the ruins of Geroldseck, at the time when Germany was in its utmost need, and again bring triumph and glory to their countrymen.

All nations have had their mythological age, in which the destroyers of mankind have generally found no difficulty in soaring up to the thrones of the celestial regions. The last Odin, in this way, became the rightful monarch of Valhalla; and the statue of the king of the Cherusci was exalted on the pillar of the god of battles. We doubt not but that the bards of Arminius found the defeat of Varus and his legions announced with all due clearness and precision in the dread oracles of the Oak; and, making allowance for change of circumstances, we may safely boast that the hierophantic race is not wholly extinct, even in the present day. Every body knows how skilfully Mr. Granville Penn contrived to discover, within a very few months after the end of the last Russian campaign, that all Bonaparte's bulletins and bivouacks — Moscow, Smolensko, and Kutosoff, and Tchitchagoff, were all lying snugly enough wrapped up in the 38th and 39th chapters of Ezekiel; and if affairs had not fortunately taken another turn, there was a time when their majesties of Austria, Wirtemberg, Prussia, &c. &c., and certain other of their cashiered compeers, would have had a fair chance of ranking amongst the seven heads and the ten horns, at

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* 1. Illustrations of Northern Antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian Romances; being an Abstract of the Book of Heroes and Nibelungen Lay; with Translations of Metrical Tales from the old German, Danish, Swedish, and Icelandic Languages, with Notes and Dissertations. By Mr. Weber and Mr. Jamieson. 2. Altdeutsche Wälder, durch der Brüder Grimm. 3. Lieder der Alten Edda, aus der handschrift herausgegeben und erklärt durch der Brüder Grimm. 4. Nordische Helden Romane, uebersetzt durch F. H. von der Hagen. 5. Altnordische Sagen und Lieder, &c. herausgegeben durch F. H. von der Hagen. 6. Der beiden Altesten Deutschen Gedichte aus dem Achten Jahrhundert, Das Lied von Hildebrand und Hadabrand und das Weissenbrunner, gebet zum erstenmal in ihrem Metrum, dargestellt und herausgegeben durch der Brüder Grimm. 7. Literarischer Grundriss zur Geschichte der Deutschen Poesie, durch F. H. von der Hagen und J. G. Büsching. 8. Der Heldenbuch, herausgegeben durch F. H. von der Hagen. 9. Ueber der Altdeutschen Meister Gesang, von Jacob Grimm. 10. Der Lied der Nibelungen in der Ursprache, mit der Lesarten der verschiedenen Handschriften, herausgegeben durch F. H. von der Hagen. 11. Sammlung Deutschen Volks Lieder, herausgegeben durch Büsching und Von der Hagen. — Vol. xxvi. p. 181. February, 1816.

least in the opinion of more than one acute and learned expounder of the book of Revelation.

There has been as rapid a transition from military fame to romantic fabling in less obscure periods. By ascribing to the successful warrior somewhat of supernatural prowess, the vanquished have been willing to extenuate their shame, and the victors to enhance their glory. When Alexander buried the armour fitted for limbs of more than mortal mould, he had a latent foreboding of the light in which he was to be considered by future generations in Persia and India, who would picture him now mounted on his griffin, and darting through the clouds, and now sunk beneath the billows in his house of glass, and compelling the inhabitants of every element to own him as their sovereign. The pride of the Franks bestowed more crowns upon Charlemagne than that doughty and orthodox emperor ever claimed. And the prowess of Roland must be gathered from the song of the minstrel, and not from the dry historical brevity of eginhart, where we shall seek in vain for the terrific imagery of the battle of Roncesvalles, in the ambush of the Gascons, and the death of the prefect Rotlandus. The investigations of the historians of chivalrous fiction have been hitherto confined to the romances of the French and their numerous imitators; and the subject, although by no means exhausted, has yet become tolerably familiar. The errant knights whom we have usually encountered, either aspire to a seat at the Round Table, or owe allegiance to the lilied banner; and with these most of us are now very tolerably acquainted. Amadis of Gaul and Palmerin of England are almost as well known to us as Wellington and Bonaparte; while their outlandish antagonists, the bearded Soldans and recreant Saracens, are about as familiar as the Imperial Mamelukes or the Polish Lancers. The very giants of any note are of our own kith and kin; and, upon a nearer acquaintance, the fierce Morholt dwindles into a tall Irishman, hardly half a foot above the regulation standard of a widow hunter.

It is far otherwise in the national romances of the Germans. We gaze there on strange countenances, and listen to stranger names: and it is with some difficulty that we are at length enabled to recognise the Gothic and Hunnish subverters of the Roman empire, in the throng of frowning warriors, who gradually recede from our view, until they lose themselves amidst the remote and visionary forms of Scandinavian mythology. When Europe was overwhelmed by the Teutonic nations, the distinctions between these kindred tribes were not so sharply defined as at later periods. The Christianity of the Germans afterwards contributed still more to separate them from such of the same stock as adhered to their old religion. But whilst the early conquests were going on, they were constantly intermingling. And there is, therefore, less reason to be surprised at the wide diffusion of the fables whose historical groundwork is to be found in the achievements of that eventful age, than at the various disguises which they assume.

The earliest vestiges of the Teutonic story are preserved in the poems of the older Edda, collected by Sæmund Sigufson, who lived between the years 1051 and 1121, which have been published at large, for the first time, both by Grimm and Hagen (Nos. 3. and 5.) From these the Volsunga Saga was compiled, in the same manner as the prose romances of chivalry were afterwards formed out of the metrical originals. The hero Sigurd slays the dragon Fofner, and wins the fatal treasure which he guards. He awakens Brynhilld, the wise, the warlike, and the fair, from the magic slumber into which she has been cast by Odin, and plights

his faith to her: but the charmed drink prepared by Grimhilld causes him to lose all remembrance of his vows, and to become the husband of Gudrun, the daughter of the sorceress. The subsequent adventures of the Volsunga Saga, as far as the assassination of Sigurd, and the voluntary death of Brynhilld, may be seen in Mr. Herbert's translations, to which it must be added, that Swanhilde, the daughter of Sigurd, becomes the wife of King *Jormunrett*, who, deceived by the traitor Bikke, causes her to be trampled to death by wild horses. Agreeing in substance, but with the usual variations of traditionary poetry, the story of the German "Lay of the Nibelungen" is found in the ancient Danish ballads — the "Kiempe and Elskoos viser," the most important of which have been admirably translated by Mr. Jamieson.

The latest of the Scandinavian works, relating to the German heroes of the first race, is the "Welkina and Niflunga Saga," which was compiled, in the 13th century, from the "songs of the Danes and Swedes, the poetry of the Northmen, and the ancient romances and traditions of the North of Germany." In the very curious ancient preface, the author apologises for the poetical exaggerations of the Scalds, and magnifies the importance of his Saga, "which begins in Apulia, and travels northward to Lombardy and Venice, and Thuringia and Hungary and Sweden, and also into Valland (either Italy or France) and Spain. And of all these kingdoms does this Saga treat, and describes the deeds which were performed therein."

The Jormunreck of the Edda, the Ermenrich of the German romances, is undoubtedly the Great Ermanaric, whom Jornandes compares to another Alexander: and as the same historian notices the fate of Swanhilld, under the name of Saniel or Senilda, an undeniable proof is thus afforded of the antiquity of the Scaldic rhapsodies. The Arthur of Teutonic romance, however, is the hero Dieterich of Bern; and he and his companions appear more or less prominently in all the poems which compose the cycle. It is thought that their deeds of high emprize were sung in the "ancient and barbarous verses," which, according to Eginhart, were collected by Charlemagne. His partiality for these national legends may have given rise to the traditionary fable contained in the annals of Snorro, according to which he carried his curiosity still farther; for, as he wished to see the very persons of these renowned champions, the Earl Widforull evoked their spectres, who arose obedient to the spell, mounted on their war steeds, and clothed in full armour. The ghostly squadron advanced in four divisions, and when Dieterich came before the emperor, they sprung from their chargers, and seated themselves in his presence. Dieterich was known by his towering stature, and by his shield, upon which, as in his lifetime, was emblazoned a crowned lion. His right, however, to bear this ancient device of the Gothic kings becomes somewhat questionable, from the induction to the "Heldenbuch," from which it may be inferred, that the "evil spirit Machmet," whom the mother of Dieterich found lying by her side, when King Dietmar, his reputed father, was on a journey, had some reason to take more than usual interest in the fate of the unborn hero, who, as he prophesied, would breathe fire when he was enraged — a gift which afterwards proved of essential service to him. The spirit also assured her that her son would become "a right pious hero;" — "and in three nights the devil built a fair strong castle, which is now the castle of Bern." The city of Verona, to which the name of Bern was given in the Gothic dialects, was the capital of Dieterich's kingdom, from which he was ex-

pelled by his uncle Ermenrich, the Emperor of Rome, and compelled to take refuge in the royal camp of Etzel (Attila), the king of the Huns. It happens, unfortunately indeed, that Attila died in 453, while Ermanaric flourished nearly a century earlier; and the great Theodorick the Ostrogoth was born some years after Attila's death: but, notwithstanding these anachronisms, and the contradictory statements in the romances, which we have not room to notice, there is good reason to suppose that Theodorick is the historical prototype of Dieterich of Bern, — "he, who was the greatest captain known in the wide world, and whose name shall never be lost in the southern kingdoms, so long as the world shall stand." These are the expressions of the romancers, who may well have been dazzled by the fame of the son of Theodomir (Dietmar), when the hostile Greek pronounces him to have been inferior to no one who had borne the Imperial dignity. The phrensy which preceded the death of Theodorick, when he beheld the countenance of the murdered Symmachus in the head of the fish which was served on his royal table, has furnished matter both for the fictions of superstition and romance. At the hour of his death, a Catholic hermit saw the Arian monarch conducted to the volcano of Lipari, bound and barefooted, between Pope John and Symmachus, who join forces to hurl him into the crater. The romantic legends have shown scarcely more mercy than Gregory the Great, who relates the foregoing story. In the "Heldenbuch," he is summoned to depart by a dwarf who warns him, that "his kingdom is no longer of this world," and then disappears with him "no man knows whither." And in the poem of "Attila's Court," he is placed under the power of Satan, who bears him to the desert, where, as a punishment for his sins, he is condemned to defend himself against the attacks of three serpents, — a dreadful conflict, which is to continue till the day of judgment.

The flight of Theodorick to the Huns is attributed, with less chronological inconsistency, although history is silent as to the fact, to the envy of Ottacher (Odoacer), in an exceedingly curious fragment, which, from the language and metre employed in it, must have been composed in the eighth century, and which stands at the head of the history both of German poetry and of German romance. In ancient manuscripts, particularly of the northern languages, it is very usual to find poetical compositions written straight on like prose, without any breaks at the ends of the verses; the terminations of which are sometimes, though not uniformly, indicated by metrical points at the ends of the lines. And this circumstance having been overlooked by Eccard, who first published the "Lay of Hildebrand and Hadabrand," he considered it as poetical prose, in which he has been followed by Mr. Weber. The late editors, Messrs. J. and W. Grimm, have successfully regulated the metre of this valuable relic (No. 6.), and shown that it is exactly the same in principle with that employed in the Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon; to which latter language the dialect of the poem bears a near affinity.

It is thought that the traditions respecting Dieterich are chiefly derived from the Lombards. But the favourite hero of the northern parts of Germany was Siegfried or Sifrit, the Sigurd of the Volsunga Saga. Romance has her relics as well as religion. The maces of Orlando and Oliver were long shown by the monks of Roncesvalles; and the spear of Siegfried, "a mighty pine beam," was kept with equal veneration at Worms, where Siegfried was fabled to have reigned. There also, in the church of St. Cecilia, his grave is to be found, which the emperor Frederick the Third caused to be opened, in search of the giant's bones.

The German romances do not represent him as overtopping his brother heroes; but they all agree that he became invulnerable by bathing in the blood, or, as some have it, in the fat of the slaughtered dragon, by which he acquired the name of "Hörnen Siegfried, *i. e.* Horny, or Impenetrable Siegfried."

The vengeance which was wreaked on Siegfried's murderers by Chrimhild (who corresponds to Godrunn in the Saga), is the subject of the celebrated "Nibelungen Lied," which in every respect may be considered as one of the most remarkable productions of the middle ages. Madame de Staël, who gives a very superficial notice of this poem, seems to have supposed that it had lately been discovered, which is not altogether correct. Many fragments of it were published by Old Wolfgang Lazius, who quotes it as historical authority, with the same intrepidity as he has given a full-length portrait of an antediluvian gentleman in pantaloons and galloches. The revival of good taste in Germany is, in great measure, owing to the critical writings of Bodmer. He will be recollected as the warm admirer of English literature, which he defended against the objections of Gottsched; and he was also one of the first who attempted to draw the ancient German poets from their obscurity. Having found a MS. of the Nibelungen in the old family library of the Counts of Hohenems, he published the latter half of the poem, under the title of "Chrimhildren Rache;" for, as to the former half, he suppressed it, "for the same reason that Homer did not begin the Trojan war with the egg of Leda;" and a complete edition was not given to the public till the appearance of the first volume of Müller's collection of ancient German poetry in 1784. M. von der Hagen, the late editor, bears the name of one of the principal characters in the poem,—which Aubrey would have added to his chapter of name fatalities. His second edition (No. 10.), a work of great value and labour, is "on the plan of those which have been given of the works of classical antiquity," the text being formed by a careful collation of such manuscripts as he could procure: and a very copious Appendix of various readings is added. The merit of M. von der Hagen's edition has been much canvassed; for it seems that he has occasionally acted with a certain degree of *Brunckian* boldness: but if a critical editor were deprived of the bliss of conjectural emendation, there would be little left to encourage him in his toil.

This national epic, as it is termed by M. von der Hagen, in an appropriate dedication to the celebrated Wolf, has lately attracted a most unprecedented degree of attention in Germany. It now actually forms a part of the philological courses in many of their universities; and it has been hailed with almost as much veneration as the Homeric songs. Great allowances must be made for German enthusiasm; but it cannot be denied that the "Nibelungen Lied," though a little too bloody and dolorous, possesses extraordinary merits. The story turns upon the adventures of the Princess Chrimhild of Burgundy, who is first won by the valiant Siegfried; and, after he is treacherously murdered, gives her hand to Etzel (or Attila) king of the Huns, chiefly in hopes that through his power and influence she may be revenged on the murderers of her former lord. The assassins, accordingly, and all their kin, are induced to visit the royal Etzel at Vienna, where, by the instigation of the queen, a deadly feud arises; in the course of which, almost the whole army on both sides are cruelly slaughtered. By the powerful but reluctant aid of Dieterich of Bern, however, the murderer of Siegfried is at last vanquished, and brought bound to the feet of the queen, who relentlessly raises the sword of the

departed hero, and, with her own hand, strikes off the head of his enemy. Hildebrand instantly avenges the atrocious and inhospitable act, by stabbing the Queen, — who falls exulting on the body of her hated victim. The work is divided into thirty-eight books or adventures; and, besides a liberal allowance of sorcery and wonders, contains a great deal of clear and animated narrative, and innumerable curious and picturesque traits of the manners of the age. The characters are in general very powerfully and naturally drawn, especially that of Haghen, the murderer of Siegfried, in whom the virtues of an heroic and chivalrous leader are strangely united with the atrocity and impenitent hardihood of an assassin. There are also occasional traits of humour in this piece, that add to the effect of the picture; but its predominant character certainly is that of gloom and terror — by no means unadorned with epic dignity. The abstract of this singular work by Mr. Weber is one of the most curious parts of the English collection; and the specimens which are translated appear to us to be rendered with equal spirit and fidelity.

It would require a minute analysis of the Scandinavian and German poems and manners, to show how the history of Siegfried, as preserved in the traditions of different nations, corresponds in most of the leading points, though with great variations in the detail. As to Attila, his reign made an indelible impression. To this day the Swabian hinds point out the ruins occasioned by his devastations; and the very child-eating *ogres* of Mother Goose prove how severely the inhabitants of Gaul smarted under the *Ugri* or Hungri, the savage armies of the Scourge of God. Whether the present Hungarians are or are not descended from the ancient Huns, they have prided themselves in reckoning Attila amongst their monarchs; and, in the time of the oldest historian of Hungary, the secretary of King Dela, he was already the subject of the "fables of the peasants and the trivial songs of the minstrels." The catastrophe of the Nibelungen is thought by Grimm to be a poetical fiction, founded on the great battle of Chalons. Goths fought there against Goths; and the vassal kings of Attila, Walamir, Theodomir, and Widemir, of the noble race of the *Amali*, like Dieterich the "King of the *Amelungen*," are forced to bear arms against the Ostrogoths and Burgundians under Ætius. An additional feature of resemblance is given by Jornandes, who relates, that a brook which flowed through the field of battle was swelled to the size of a torrent by human gore, so that the wounded were compelled to slake their feverish thirst by drinking the blood of the killed and wounded; an incident which occurs in the Nibelungen, as well as in the Danish ballad corresponding to that portion of the story.

The author of the Lay of the Nibelungen has not been ascertained. Taking the language as a criterion, it must have been written, according to Grimm, between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; but he is of opinion that this is only a rifacciamento of a much earlier work. The remaining metrical romances, which form the German cycle, are of different dates. The adventure of the Emperor Otnit, and of Hug-Dieterich and Wolf-Dieterich, the ancestors of Dieterich of Bern, were composed by Wolfram of Eschenbach, a poet who will be again mentioned. These poems, together with the Rose-Garden of Chrimhild, and the Rose-garden of the magic dwarf, King Lawrin of the Tyrol, form the ancient collection, called the "Heldenbuch," or book of heroes; and they have been ably analysed by Mr. Weber. Others relate to Siegfried, and to the adventures of Dieterich of Bern; such as his flight to the Huns, and his battles with Ecke, Fasold, and Ebenrot, the giants of the "land of

Aggrippinan." The most modern of the series, is Attila's Court, which was written, or at least patched together, from ancient traditional legends, by Caspar von der Roen, a singer at fairs and markets in the fifteenth century.

The works of which we have now been speaking relate to the oldest period of German history,—and form, by their subjects, a link between the ancient and the modern world. Some of these, however, we have seen, are not of themselves of very great antiquity;—and though probably fabricated from materials of an older date, are not, in their present form, by any means, the oldest compositions in the language. For, these, we must go back to the days of Charlemagne, who actually began to compile a grammar of his native dialect; in which, however, it is to be presumed, he had considerable assistance; as Eginhart confesses, that his royal master, although he kept his table-book constantly under his pillow to practise at every leisure moment, yet was never able to make any great progress in the art and mystery of writing. But the first important work in which it was employed, was due to his son, Lewis the Pious. This monarch, being desirous that all his subjects speaking the "Theodisc language" should be enabled to read the Scriptures, "ordered a Saxon, who, amongst his own people, was reputed to be no vulgar bard, to make a poetical translation of the Old and New Testament into the German tongue." This we learn from a Latin fragment published by Du Chesne. And it is added by Hincmar, that the translator was a peasant, who fancied that he had been specially inspired by Heaven, and gifted with a supernatural vein of poetry, to enable him to execute his undertaking. It is supposed by Eccard, and the other German philologists, that the "Harmony of the four Evangelists," in the Cottonian Library, forms a part of this translation. This ancient translation is written in an alliterative metre, which, according to Hickes, is the same which was employed by the Pseudo-Cædmon; but Hickes soon abandoned his first opinion, that it had been composed by an Anglo-Saxon, and adjudged it to "a Frank of the age of Charlemagne." Junius imagined that it had been composed in a language invented by the translator himself, and compounded of the Anglo-Saxon, the Danish, and the Gothic,—which would hardly have made it more intelligible to King Cnute, for whose use he conjectured it had been intended. Others consider it as a monument of the ancient Saxon, then spoken between the Rhine and the Weser. The fact seems to be, that in the ancient Teutonic, like the Greek of the days of Homer, the different dialects were nascent and faintly marked; and we may judge from the expressions of the Latin preface, that Lewis intended that the translation should be intelligible throughout the whole extent of his German dominions. Hickes was delighted with the "magnificence of the diction" of this "golden codex." It is less known that Klopstock, who chanced to peruse the printed extracts, thought so highly of its poetical merit that he endeavoured to procure a transcript of the whole. A manuscript, with some lamentable *lacunæ*, but agreeing very clearly with the Cottonian codex, was discovered some years ago by M. Gleg, a very modest and intelligent Frenchman, in the Cathedral library at Bamberg, where the librarian sagaciously described it as "an old bible, which nobody could understand;" and of this manuscript, the defects being supplied from that in the British Museum, an edition has been very long in preparation by the veteran Reinwald. In a notice now before us, he states, that the study of the text, and the composition of the commentaries and glossaries

which are to elucidate it, have employed him during five and twenty years. If this important work ever does appear, it will form a valuable accompaniment to the Gospels of Ulfila.

The request of some of the brethren of Ottfried, a monk of the abbey of Weissenburgh, added to the more powerful entreaties of the venerable matron Judith, induced this good Benedictine to compose his paraphrase of the four Gospels, about the year 870. Alliteration appears to have fallen quickly into disuse in Germany; and Ottfried gives us the earliest known specimen of German rhyme. His religious adherence to the biblical text necessarily precluded much display of imagination; but he occasionally ventures on a few embellishments and similes. The messenger of God, the angel of heaven, in bringing his "errand of love," flies "through the path of the sun," the "starry way," and "the *sea* of clouds."

> "Tho quam boto fona Gote, Engil in himile,
> Braht er therera worolti, diuri, sin arunti
> Floug er sunnum pad, sterrno straza,
> Wogo wolkono, zi ther witins frono."

And the infant Saviour is described as growing amongst men, like a lily amongst thorns: —

> "Thaz Kinda wuahs untar mannon, so lilia untar thornon."

The victory gained in the year 883, by Lewis the Third, at Sodalenich, where he defeated the Normans, was recorded, as is stated in a contemporary chronicle, "not only in our annals, but also in our national songs." The Franks had not yet adopted the language of their vassal Gauls. And one of their national songs, which has been fortunately preserved, is written in the pure Franco-Theotisc dialect, and consequently belongs to the history of German poetry. There are animated passages in this ancient ballad. "Hludwaig takes shield and spear," and leads on his troops "singing the joyful lay Kyrie eleison." This pious strain inspires them with confidence, "and the blood rises in the cheeks of the Franks as they justed." The "rhythm," or rather ode, in praise of the virtues of Anno, a holy archbishop of Cologne, "who put on immortality" in the year 1070, and which was composed at no great interval after that event, has greater originality than would be readily anticipated from its title. The archbishop, like Theron and Hiero, and the rest of the swift charioteers of Pindar, is almost lost in the vast exuberance of the poet's imagination. The history of the four great monarchies, introduced by the mystic vision of the prophet, is sketched by him with a masterly hand. He loses no opportunity of expatiating on the glory of the German name; and the mixture of history and fable adds greatly to the romantic spirit of the poem. Cæsar is described as approaching to the country of his "kinsmen the noble Franks:—both their ancestors came from Troy, the ancient town." The settlement of the Franks "far on the Rhine," under the Trojan Francus, is next described; and the poet then resumes the history of Cæsar till the battle of Pharsalia;—enquiring "who can count the numbers that hastened to oppose the hero? They came in hosts and legions, as the snow falls on the Alps, as the hail pours forth from the cloud!" Battles then follow upon battles; and we hear nothing of Anno's virtues and miracles till the poet's learning is exhausted.

From these scanty remains we pass on to the period (from 1136 to 1254) during which the Imperial dignity was enjoyed by the House of Hohen-Staulfen. Upon the accession of Conrad the Third, the founder

of the Swabian line, the banquet-hall suddenly unfolds its portals, and we behold the high-places filled with kings and dukes, mailed knights and trusty squires, each of whom

——— "took the harp in glee and game,
And made a lay, and gave it name."

And the fathers of romantic poetry emerge out of the gloom of antiquity, arrayed in chivalrous splendour.

Under this new race of rulers, the dialects of the south and west of Germany obtained a decided preponderance. The Swabian or Allemannic became blended with the Franco-Theotisc, and thus formed the basis of the language of the present day, which, as in the parallel instance of the "volgare illustre" of Italy, has superseded its sister idioms, and become the sole vehicle of information.

Whatever literary impulse may have been given by the first crusade, it appears that the second produced a more decided effect, by generally diffusing the cultivation which had been maturing in the favoured regions of the South. The geographical position of the Empire caused it to become the high road for the warlike pilgrims who assembled under the banner of the cross. Its population was brought into closer connection with the songsters of Provence and Catalonia; and their polished strains were soon re-echoed in the harsher tones of the "MINNE-SINGERS," or bards of love, as they chose to name themselves, of the Swabian era. There is a familiar observation, that although courtship is agreeable enough to the parties who are engaged in it, it affords but a sorry amusement to the spectators; and we cannot help thinking that this is almost equally true of love verses. The "Minne-Lieder," however, of the ancient German poets, possess as much merit as is consistent with the class to which they belong and the school which they imitated. Their elaborate and sometimes intricate versification was copied from the laborious stanzas of the masters of the "gaye science." Their verse was less harmonious; but the decided accentuation of the German (a quality which it possesses in common with all other Teutonic dialects) enabled them to mark the rhythm of their lines with greater accuracy. The imagery of their lyrics is full of languid prettiness; although it presents too frequent a repetition of the same objects. The merle and the mavis are ever heard at the beginning of the song; the weather is always clear, the sun warm, and the fields enamelled with flowers; and many an important lesson is conveyed to the dreamer, whilst he is slumbering by the side of the glassy fountain, under the shade of the verdant plane-tree. King Thibault's criticisms on the commonplaces of the Provençals may be justly applied to their German imitators:—

"Feuille ne flors ne vaut riens en chantant,
Fors ne pas defaute sans plus de rimoier,
Et pour faire soulas moienne gent
Qui mauvais mos font sovent abayer."

The *Minne*-singers, however, frequently burst out in a flow of jovial feeling, and warm, bridegroom-like sincerity, unknown to the sentimental troubadours, by whom, as in the lay of Guillen d'Aismar, "un dolz pleurai" was preferred to an hundred smiles, — and whose raptures, too, are often affected, overcharged, and unnatural. A noble author is now considered as a rather rare occurrence. But in the age of the "Minnesingers," hardly any one dared to cultivate the art of poetry, unless he could prove his sixteen quarters. The sovereigns of Germany themselves,

emulating perhaps the example of our captive Richard, shared in the general fervour. In the valuable volume of Rudiger Maniss, which we apprehend has passed by this time from Paris to Berlin, the collection, with due regard to royal precedency, is headed by the poems of the Emperor "Henry." There were three sovereigns of this name; but, from the antiquity of Henry's diction, he is supposed to have been the son and successor of Frederick Barbarossa. The next place is held by Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, whose flowing versification would have recommended him to notice, even had he been of meaner rank. A ballad, distinguished for its tenderness, is given as the production of the Duke of Breslau. The rude simplicity of the times has annexed an ungraceful epithet to the person of Henry, the Fat Duke of Anhalt; but his poetry is by no means devoid of taste and elegance: and a single lay bears witness to the talents of the unfortunate Conradin, the last member of that powerful family which had filled the chief throne in Christendom during so many generations, and who was deprived of his life by the hands of the executioner, in the midst of the capital which he had endeavoured to wrest from his enemies. An old tradition ascribes the insecurity of the throne of Naples to the baneful spells of the wizard Arbatel! — It is full time that the sanctity of St. Januarius should exert itself to counteract them.

Although the poets of the Swabian era derived their name from their lyrical compositions, it must not be supposed that the other branches of poetry were overlooked by them. Henry of Veldeck, one of the earliest of the Minne-singers, has left a spirited paraphrase of the Æneid, taken however from the translation of Chrestien de Troyes, and not from the original. The name of "Wolfram of Eschenburg and Pleienfeld" has been transmitted to posterity, accompanied by the warmest praises of his contemporaries. "The learned Wolfram," "the wise master of the art," is never mentioned by them without some tribute of applause. This distinguished writer was the younger son of a nobleman, the Lord of Eschenburg in the Palatinate; and after receiving the order of knighthood from the Count of Heuneberg, he appears to have wandered from castle to castle, like a true courteous knight, dividing his time between feats of arms and minstrelsy. He is afterwards traced to the court of Hermann of Thuringia; and he is introduced as one of the personages in a singular poetical dialogue, in which he is represented as contending with other bards of note for the laurel crown. This trial of skill is said to have taken place at the castle of Würtzburg, in the presence of the Landgrave and his wife Sophia, and is noticed as an historical fact in the German chronicles. Few other particulars of Wolfram's life have been preserved. It can only be gathered from his works, that he encountered the usual fate of genius, — poverty and disappointment; and his tomb, in our Lady's church in the village of Eschenburg, leads to the conjecture, that, before his death, he had retired to the ancient patrimony of his family.

The "Geste" of King Rother connects itself both with the "Heldenbuch" and the Cycle of Charlemaine: as he is represented as the father of Pepin. This poem, and a fragment of the history of the expeditions of the French monarch against the Saracens, are the earliest specimens now extant of the German metrical romance. But King Arthur and his knights soon divided the empire of fiction with "Roland and Oliver," and the national heroes of the Garden of Roses; and the fame which Eschenbach enjoyed is principally due to the romantic epics — for they deserve the name — which he composed on the subject of the Saint Greal. Those who are versed in Northern literature would do well to enquire

whether the British fictions may not have had some influence on those of Scandinavia; particularly as the Normans retained their language, and kept up their connections with the North, long after they had settled in Neustria. In the Wilkina Saga we find a king "Artus of Bertingaland" (Britany, or perhaps Britain, which is also frequently named in the Kæmpe-viser), whose daughter Hilda was so intent upon her prayers, that the adventurous Hubert was unable to get a sight of her countenance, until she looked off her book to wonder at two mice running up the church-wall, which her lover had decorated with gold and silver. After the death of Artus, his kingdom was usurped by King Ilsung; but his two sons escaped to the dominions of Attila, who bestowed "Brandinaberg" upon "Jarl Iron" the eldest, and the husband of the wary Isold; and "Tyra near the Rhine" upon Apollonius, who married the daughter of King Solomon of Frankarika, which generally signifies France; though M. von der Hagen supposes that it is used in this instance for Franconia. We cannot pretend to clear up this whimsical confusion of well known names; and shall content ourselves with remarking, that a King Solomon appears in the annals of Britany nearly in the age of Attila; and that the name of Apollonius of Tyre may have been long naturalised in the North, since the Greek romance was translated into the Anglo-Saxon at a very early period.

The Germans appear to have become acquainted with the metrical romances of the Round Table, nearly as soon as they assumed their present form. But it is singular that Eschenbach accuses Chrestien de Troyes, the author of Percival, of having "falsified the tale," which had been "truly told by Master Kyot of Provence." The German commentators assume that the poem thus alluded to was written in the Provençal dialect; but Le Grand has shown, that the existence of such romances amongst that people is exceedingly problematical; and we rather suspect that Eschenbach is praising a work, now probably lost, of Guiot de Provins, whose satirical "bible" shows that he was a writer of no ordinary talent. There are few subjects better calculated for romantic poetry than the mystic Greal, when, as in the Mort Arthur, it enters, preceded by peals of thunder, borne by invisible hands, "filling the hall with sweet odours," and illumined by beams "seven times brighter than the light of day." Eschenbach has made the Saint Greal the central point, if the expression may be allowed, of an innumerable variety of adventures, which he has combined, like Ariosto, in artful perplexity, in the poems of Percival and Titurel. The Greal is intrusted to Titurel, the son of Titurison and Elizabeth of Arragon; — angels led him to Mont-Salvatz, in the midst of a dreary forest near Salvatierra in Gallicia; and the model of the magnificent temple which is to contain the holy vessel is framed by celestial hands. The Greal is at length conveyed to India, where it rests in the dominions of Prester John, far out of the reach of the profane, and under the guardianship of a chosen band of Round-Table chivalry. The heathen Flegetanis is quoted as the author of the tale, which Kyot, "well learned in the heathen tongues," found written at Toledo. At first this appears like the veracious references to the sage Cid Hamet Benengeli; but the poems of Eschenbach certainly abound in orientalisms, which the original authors probably obtained from the Spanish Moors; and some of which, for we could easily add to the number, have been ably pointed out by Görres.

The German versions of Iwain and Gawain, and of Sir Tristrem, are interesting, from their relation to the antiquities of this country. Iwain and Gawain was brought to Germany by a knight (Sir Hartmann of Awe)

who had long resided in England, where he had read the story in "the French books."

> " Der (Hartmann) bracht dise mere,
> Zu tulsch als ich han vernommen
> Do er usz Engelandt was kommen
> Da er vil zit was gewesen
> Hat ers an den Welschen buchen gelesen."

The Tristan of Götfried of Strasburg, who lived in the early part of the 13th century, throws fresh obscurity on an enquiry which is already sufficiently perplexing. It will be recollected, that, according to Mr. Scott's hypothesis, Thomas of Ercildoun must have composed his poem about the year 1250, and that he is identified with the "Tomas" whose authority is appealed to in the ancient French fragment. But Götfried, who, according to the accounts which are given of him, must have written some years before the date assigned by Mr. Scott to the Rhymer's poem, gives a similar preference to the tale of "Thomas of Brittanie," who read the lives of the kings (lantherren) in the British books.

> * " Si ne sprachen in der rihti niht
> Alse Thomas von Brittanie giht,
> Der Aventure ein meister waz
> Undan Britaniochen buchen laz
> Aller der lantherren leben,
> Unde ez uns ze Kunde het gegeben."

The poem was concluded, Götfried having left it unfinished, by Henry of Vriberg, who calls the original, a poem written by Thomas in the "*Lombard tongue*," Lampartischer zunge, — an expression to which it is not easy to affix a definite meaning. A second continuation was written by Ulric of Thürheim, and a third by an unknown writer, according to whom, "the adventure was first composed by Eylhart of Hobergin." This name is variously corrupted, and neither the age nor the country of the person whom it designates has been ascertained. All that is known is, that he was a contemporary of "Thomas;" for in an ancient note at the head of the MS. of Götfried's Tristrem, in the royal library at Munich (which is repeated in substance in the printed prosaic romance), it is stated that "the history was first written by Tohmnas of Brittania, and that he lent the book to one Dilhart of Oberet, who afterwards put it into rhyme." From these discordant authorities, we can only collect the fact of the wide diffusion of the fame of "Thomas," whoever he was. It may not be irrelevant to add, that Sir Thomas Malory follows his namesake of Ercildoun much closer than the *printed* French romance, as the Mort Arthur has the permutation † of Sir Tristrem's name, to which there is no allusion whatever in the latter.

The Swabian era produced upwards of two hundred poets, many of whom are deserving our attention. But, for the present, we shall imitate the prudent conduct of the Persian author of the Shah Nameh, who consoles his readers, in every page, by telling them that he has omitted many particulars, "lest they should get the headach:" and we shall abridge

* The whole passage, which affords much room for speculation, is too long for insertion. Since writing the above, the "Wiener Allgemeine Litteratur Zeitung," for June last, has reached us. It contains a review of Mr. Scott's edition of Sir Tristrem; and the subject is there fully discussed.

† "Thenne he answered, I am of the countree of Lyones, and my name is Sir *Tramtryst*, that thus was wounded in a batayll as I fought for a ladye's ryght." — M. Arthur, b. 7. c. 6.

their labour as well as our own, by merely observing, that in the dawning of literature, the Germans fully kept pace with the rest of Europe. Under Rudolph of Hapsburg (1273) and his successors, they began to lose ground; and the brilliancy which had distinguished the preceding era gradually died away. The Western and Southern states of Europe, from England round to Sicily, in which polite literature was rapidly advancing, were in a state of uninterrupted intercourse with each other, occasioned sometimes by the friendship of their rulers, and just as often by their dissensions. But the members of the empire became estranged from this portion of the European commonwealth; and attached themselves, in preference, to their neighbours of Sclavonian and Tartar race, to Hungary and Bohemia and Poland and their dependencies, which had now acquired stability and opulence. Alliances were multiplied with these countries; some of them became incorporated in the Empire, and others passed under the dominion of German princes. But this intercourse with the semi-barbarous descendants of Lech, Czech, and Maysor, could neither improve the taste of the Germans, nor excite their emulation.

In the Swabian age, gnomic poetry had not been disregarded; and those who are already blessed with patience may no doubt acquire other graces from the perusal of Master Treigedank, who has left us an awful string of moral aphorisms. The admonitions given by King Tyrol of Scotland to his son King Fridebant are also preserved in a poem of some merit. Schiller, the learned editor, with great simplicity, expresses his surprise on finding that this worthy monarch is omitted by Boëthius and Buchanan. The writer, who has given weight to his doctrine by placing it in the mouth of King Tyrol, has been imitated by another poet, who ascribes his lessons of justice and modesty to Winsbeke and Winsbekin, an exemplary couple, who lived in the time of Barbarossa. When the Germans were cut off from the influence of foreign literature, this characteristic feature of their poetry, which had hitherto appeared in a subordinate light, now became more decidedly predominant. Romantic poetry, in general, assumed a didactic cast; and the place of fancy and invention was supplied by sober commonplace and morality.

It is difficult to establish a definite boundary for the different periods of literary history; they melt into each other like the colours of the rainbow. In Conrad of Würtzburg, who flourished towards the conclusion of the thirteenth century, we find the glow of better days, united to some of the peculiarities of the later "Master-singers" of Augsburg and Nuremburg. "The tale of Troy divine" forms the subject of Conrad's principal work. It is borrowed, though with such alteration as to entitle it to be considered an original composition, from some of the Romanesque translations of the legend-like narrations of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis. He compares the story to an "endless flood"—and with reason, according to his method of amplifying it; as the portion which has been printed, and which contains upwards of twenty-five thousand verses, just brings it down to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. The "Trojanisches Krieg" has the customary anachronisms of the middle ages; the half-naked heroes of Greece are clad in plate armour; and the deities of Olympus descend like the gaudy pageants of a Flemish Keriness: but passages of great beauty may be selected from it. The infant Paris, for instance, is described as being delighted with his image reflected in the broad shining glaive of the knight whom Priam has charged with his destruction, and as "smiling so sweetly" on the murderers, as to unman them for the completion of their errand. Conrad is ever complaining of the downfall

of knightly virtue, and the apathy of the great, who had ceased to cultivate poetry themselves, and left it unpatronised in others; yet he indignantly exclaims, "he cares not for their gifts — his tongue shall not be silent, since the art itself will reward him;—he will continue his song, like the nightingale — she who sings for her own sake; hidden in the woods, her notes assuage her cares, nor does she heed whether any stranger listens to the strain." In the same spirit, his allegorical poem entitled "The Complaint of Art," introduces the genius of poetry, pallid, poverty-struck, and scarcely covered by a tattered robe of grass-green "samito," preferring her complaints before the throne of justice. The versification of this little poem equals the best productions of modern Germany. Conrad's poem in praise of the Virgin, and which bears the apparently incongruous title of "Die Goldene Schmiede," has lately been published by M. Grimm; it is a fluent rhapsody, in which earth and heaven are ransacked to furnish praises for his patroness.

When Conrad of Würtzburg vented his complaints, a few princes and high-born lords, amongst whom Otto the Marquis of Brandenburg, and the Count of Leiningen, may be named as the most distinguished, still continued to imitate the style of the Swabian poets: but they had no successors. The art expired amongst the nobility; and the scene was suddenly changed. We must now quit the grey battlements and lofty towers of the mountain fortress, and direct our way to the opulent and industrious city, whose fillagree steeples and painted roofs rise on each other in picturesque confusion. In her new dwelling, the Muse was compelled to abandon the themes in which she had hitherto delighted. The witchery of romantic adventure awakened no kindred sensation in the breast of the formal prevost or the drowsy burgher. The prowess of Dieterich, in evading the blows of the knotty club of the tremendous Siegenot, was lost, when detailed to those whose notions of a giant were modelled upon the wooden Rowland which stared with immovable ferocity in front of the stadthouse, or the clumsy pasteboard "Reus" which had paraded through the streets on last Corpus-Christi day: and Sir Tristrem's skill in the noble science of the chase would have been but lightly esteemed, we suspect, unless the "hart of Ten," duly "broken and undone," was actually served up at table in the savoury form of a venison pasty. Even the most tender portions of romance became equally exceptionable. In the country, the "word of fear" is heard from every tree only in the merry spring-tide; but in the warm atmosphere of the town, the note of the malicious songster resounds from January to December. There the courtly complaisance of an Yseult or a Geneura might have excited many an awkward whisper; and many a furred cap would have sat uneasy on the civic brow, had the name of Horny Siegfried dropped from the lips of the heedless minstrel. Thus restricted, the chief recommendation of verse consisted in its being a fit medium for "proffittable ensamples" and discreet advice; and although lighter subjects were not wholly excluded, yet they were sure to be treated with becoming soberness and gravity.

Henry of Meissen, who, like our moral Gower, went

> —— "the myddell way,
> And wrote a boke by tweene the twey,
> Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore,"

was afterwards considered by the "Master-singers" as the founder of their schools. This writer, a doctor of theology, and a canon of the

cathedral of Mentz, obtained the surname of "Frauenlob" or "Praise-the-ladies," from the tenour of his poems. His admiration, however, of the fair was perfectly Platonic—his contemplative poetry is only warmed by mystical devotion; and, in addressing the Virgin Mary, he considers the whole sex as ennobled by the rays which dart from its deified representative. His praises, however, such as they were, seem to have been singularly agreeable to the women of Mentz. We know not what rewards their gratitude bestowed upon him in his lifetime; but they gave an extraordinary demonstration of it at his funeral. "On the eve of St. Andrew, in the year 1318," we read in the old chronicle of Albert of Strasburgh, "Henry, surnamed 'Frauenlob,' was buried at Mentz, in the *parvis* of the great church near unto the stairs, with marvellous solemnity. His corpse was carried by women from his dwelling-house unto the place of burial; and loudly did they moan and bewail his death, on account of the infinite praises which he had bestowed on womankind in his poetry." And the chronicle then adds, that "so much good wine was poured into the grave, that it overflowed with the libations;"—a strange and almost heathen ceremony adopted by these disconsolate mourners! Frauenlob had an active competitor in the person of Master Bartholomew Regenbogen, by whom he was bitterly attacked. Regenbogen himself informs us, that he was once "a smith," and "earned his bread right pitifully on the hard anvil." He did not improve his worldly circumstances by taking to his new calling; yet he remained true to it, notwithstanding he inveighs loudly against the avarice of his patrons, and occasionally threatens that he will return again to his hammer.

New metrical romances were no longer composed, although some of the more ancient favourites, particularly those which now form the "Heldenbuch," were re-written about this time, and the diction altered so as to make them more generally intelligible. The love of fiction took another turn, and produced what may be termed the mixed romance, in which the biography of distinguised persons of no remote age was strangely disguised by arbitrary inventions, in the manner of the metrical life of Richard Cœur de Lion. A fanciful poem of this description, "The Life of Duke Ernest of Bavaria," has been attributed, but without adequate proof, to Henry of Veldeck. It has been noticed, that it has been imitated in the second part of the romance of Huon de Bourdeaux. Duke Ernest is of an ancient date; but the fashion did not spread until the times of which we are now speaking, in which many works of this nature originated. Conrad of Würtzburg wrote a poetical history of the Duke of Austria's expedition against the Infidels in Prussia, where, by the way, they appear to have made a pretty durable settlement. The history of Henry the Lion, Duke of Brunswick, is still popular amongst the German peasantry. The Devil carries this celebrated warrior on his back, like the Bishop in Coleridge's Ballads, and conveys him from the Holy Land to Brunswick, where he arrives when he is least expected, and reveals himself to his wife, a second Runnild, who is on the point of becoming a reluctant bride, by dropping the "gimmel ring" in the golden goblet. With these romances are connected a class of poems, holding a middle place between the longer romantic relations and the common ballad, most of which are grounded on some marvellous incident: the history of Anthijr, a valiant king of the Mecklenburg Vandals; the history of Sir Peter of Stauffenberg and the Mermaid, founded on a very ancient popular tradition, and which has been translated by Mr. Jamieson into the difficult dialect of Barbour. "The deeds of the noble hero, Thedel Unverfeden of Walmoden, may be consi-

dered as concluding the series. Those who are curious to learn how he defied the might of Satan, may consult the novel told by "Monseigneur" of the gentle knight of Almain, "moult grand voyageur en son temps," where they will find the edifying story upon which it is founded.

We have had the satisfaction of beholding a portion of the venerable body of Saint Barlaam enshrined in crystal — either his little finger or his great toe — we have unfortunately forgotten which; and therefore have read with great interest the legend in which this holy hermit acts so conspicuous a part. It was versified by Rodolph of Hohenems, who flourished between the years 1220 and 1254. The taste for these pious inventions increased; and the principal works in the Nether Saxon dialect, which began to be much cultivated in the fourteenth century were, rhyming legends and religious allegories. An amusing specimen is found in the life of St. Brandan, the Christian Odyssey, as it has been called by a German writer. The history of this holy Irishman is so extravagantly wild, that even Vincent de Beauvais, who was not easily startled, declares that he considers it as apocryphal. St. Brandan's tedious voyage appears to have been undertaken for the purpose of expiating his unbelief in the zoology of Pliny and Solinus. He reads in a "boke" of the wondrous beasts and misshapen races of men which this world contains; — he peruses, chapter after chapter, till his patience is exhausted; — and, in a fit of spleen, he throws the volume in the fire. This happened either in Jutland or in Ireland; and the very same night an angel appeared to him, and, as a fitting penance for the wanton destruction which he had occasioned, the celestial messenger enjoined him to perform a task which to the present generation appears the easiest and most amusing of all others, namely, that "*he should make the book all over again.*" We give the mandate in the words of the original —

> "Dar umme dat du dat bok vorbrant hest in dun oure
> *Dat bok mostu wedder maken:*
> Al kondestu nummer mer to frauden raken."

In order to collect materials for this rifacciamento, the Saint provisions a vessel for a seven years' voyage, and sets sail without loss of time, accompanied by his fellow monks and his chaplain. In the process of "making the book," St. Brandan has shown that he was a thorough-paced proficient in that useful art, as he has very judiciously eked out his journal by borrowing some of the choicest adventures of Lucian's true history. All professions have their patron saints; and we think that Grub-street and Paternoster-row should join in a dinner on the tenth of May — this holy man's anniversary. Of the same age are the legends of the holy virgin, Saint Marina, who, disguised in male attire, was placed by her father in a convent of jolly friars; Theophilus, who makes over his body and soul to Satan, and is delivered by the Virgin, who cites Satan out of hell, and compels him to surrender the fatal bond; and the long and entertaining story of Zeno. All these are in the same dialect.

The numerous "universal histories" in verse, however legendary and inaccurate, were the means of diffusing information amongst the "lewed" who had not Latin enough to enable them to attack the folios of Vincent de Beauvais and Helinandus. When literature became fixed in the towns, a greater degree of attention was given to histories possessing a local interest. For these, sufficient materials were furnished by the interminable disputes and petty wars between the free cities and the neighbouring sovereigns and nobility.

From the time of Frauenlob and Regenbogen, the cultivation of German

poetry devolved almost exclusively upon the "MASTER-SINGERS" in the great towns, to whom we have already alluded. Poetry, certainly, never had so singular a fortune in any other country. It actually became one of the incorporated trades in all cities; and the burghers obtained the freedom of it as of any other corporation. Of many of these humble bards we know very little more than their names, which in truth are not particularly prepossessing: — Zwinger and Wurgendrussel, Buchenlin, Amker, and Hell-fire, Old Stoll and Young Stoll, Strong Bopp, Dang Brotscheim, Batt Spiegel, Peter Pfort, and Martin Gumpel. The period when these guilds or schools of verse first received their statutes and regulations is involved in great uncertainty. On this head the German antiquaries are divided in opinion. By M. Grimm, the Minne-singers and the Master-singers are supposed to have originally formed but one class of poets: and one of the works noticed at the head of this article maintains this theory against the objections of Docen, who has taken the opposite side of the question. At all events, these societies offer a most singular phenomenon. Composed entirely of the lower ranks of society, of hard-working tradesmen and artificers, they obtained a monopoly of verse-craft, and extended their tuneful fraternities over the greater part of the empire. Wherever the "hoch Deutsch" was spoken,there the Master-singers founded a colony; and they were even found in Bohemia, where the German was more familiar to the mixed population of the towns than the Sclavonian language.

The vulgar, all over the world, delight to indulge themselves with glitter and parade, and external distinction; and it is amusing to observe how easily the lower orders can contrive to gratify the cravings which they feel, in common with greater folks. The law will have it that the king is the sole fountain of honour; but those who are too diminutive and feeble to toil up to the pinnacle of the rock, and lave themselves in the streams of royal favour, find means to slake their thirst quite as effectually from humbler sources. A lodge of odd-fellows will marshal a funeral with as many staves and banners as could be furnished by the Lord Lion King at Arms, and all his heralds and pursuivants to boot, from Albany to Dingwall. The petty huckster of the country town has no order dangling from his button-hole, and can never hope to figure in the installation; but his veins swell with quite as much dignity when he stalks in the procession with his pinchbeck badge and embroidered apron, the grand officer of his lodge of freemasons, gazed on and admired by all the slip-shod wenches and ragged urchins of the parish. The workings of this insatiate propensity may be distinctly traced in the pride and solemnity of schools of verse of the Master-singers. The candidate was introduced with great form into the assembly. The four "merkers" or examiners sat behind a silken curtain, to pass judgment on his qualifications. One of these had Martin Luther's translation of the Bible before him, it being considered as the standard of the language. His province was to decide whether the diction of the novice was pure, and his grammar accurate. The others attended to the rhyme and metre of the composition, and the melody to which it was sung. And if they united in declaring that the candidate had complied with the statutes and regulations, he was decorated with a silver chain and badge,—the latter representing good King David playing on the harp; and he was honourably admitted into the society.

The metrical system of the Master-singers was peculiar to themselves. Their technical terms cannot be well translated; we shall therefore add the few which we shall notice in the original. Our mineralogical friends

are so well content to crackle, and whizz, and thump, through many an Anglo-Wernerian page of quartz, gneiss, trapp, schorl, blue whack, and grey whack, that we humbly hope and trust that for once the nomenclature of this marketable poesy may also be allowed to pass muster. The poems of the Master-singers were always lyrical, and actually sung to music. The entire poem was called a " bar ; " and it was divided generally into three, but sometimes into five or more stanzas, or " gesetze ; " and each " satz " also fell into three portions ; the first of which was a " stole, " the second an " abgesang, " and the third a " style, " like the first. The rhymes were classed into " stumpfe-reime, " and " klingende reime," and " stumpfe-schlage-reime, " and " klingende-schlag-reime ; " and other denominations were employed, which we shall spare ourselves the trouble of transcribing. " The poets, singers, and merkers" counted the syllables on their fingers ; and if there was a proper number of syllables in the line, it was of no consequence whether they were long or short. The length of the verse, the number of lines, and the order of the rhymes in each " stole " and " abgesang, " was variable ; and consequently their poems were susceptible of a great variety of forms, which were called tunes or " weise." The invention of a new " weise " was considered as the test of a Master-singer's abilities. There were some hundreds of these " weise, " all named after their inventors ; as, " Hans Tindeisen's rosemary " weise ; " Joseph Schmierer's flowery paradise " weise ; " Hans Fogel's fresh " weise ; " and Henry Frauenlob's yellow " weise, " and his blue, " weise " and his frog " weise, " and his looking-glass " weise." The code of criticism to which the Master-singers were subjected was contained in the rules or " Tabulatur " of the societies ; and it certainly was most unreasonably severe. They were actually prohibited from employing " sentences which nobody could understand, " or " words wherein no meaning could be discovered ; " which unfeeling interdictions are found in the 4th and 5th articles of the Nuremberg Tabulatur. The master-singers amused themselves by ascribing an extravagant antiquity to their institutions, although their statutes and regulations do not appear to have been completely established till the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Master Cyril Sprangenburgh, indeed, deduced their history from the " Celtic bards in the time of Abraham ; " and this elaborate disquisition gave such satisfaction to the society, that it was transcribed in vellum, and " bound with gold bosses, clasps, and corners," and preserved amongst their archives with as much veneration as the Florentine copy of the Pandects. The charter of incorporation of the " Twelve Wise Masters " was said to have been granted by the Emperor Otto and Pope Leo the Fourth. To show the absurdity of the fable, it will be sufficient to observe, that Conrad of Würtzburg, and Frauenlob, and others of yet later date, are said to have been cited by that Emperor, in the year 962, to appear before him at Pavia, where, as " Adam Puschmann" gravely records, " they sung before the professors of the University, and were declared to be the masters and founders of the art."

The city of Nuremberg was the Athens of these incorporated poets. To the credit of Hans Foltz, the barber and master-singer, who shaved there in the middle of the fifteenth century, it must be told, that he took great interest in promoting the then newly discovered art of printing ; and even set up a private press at his own house. None of his mastership songs have been published ; but his Mystery, or " Fastnachts Spiel," founded on the old story of " Solomon and Marcolfus," went through many editions, and became quite a stock piece. Hans Rosenblut, who

followed the trade of an illuminator or letter-painter, also excelled as a dramatic writer; and his best piece, "The Grand Turk's Mystery," is yet a favourite at the German fairs: although the Pope's ambassador, and the rest of the "corps diplomatique" who figure at the general congress assembled for the purpose of taking the Sultan's proposal into consideration, are now enacted by the wooden representatives vulgarly ycleped puppets. But none of the Master-singers can vie with the industrious Hans Sachs, the shoemaker. Hans was born at Nuremberg in the year 1494; and his father, an honest tailor, placed him, at an early age, in the free-school of the town, where, as he mentions in one of his poems, "he was indifferently taught, according to the bad system which was followed in those days." However, he "picked up a few scraps of Greek and Latin." In his fifteenth year, he learnt shoemaking; and about the same time, one Nunnenbeck, a weaver and master-singer, instructed him in the rudiments of the "meister gesang." According to an old German custom, it was usual for young workmen to travel round the country for some years, before they settled in their trade. Hans confesses that his conduct during his rambles was not altogether exemplary, but he lost no opportunity of improving himself in the "praiseworthy art;" and in his twentieth year he composed his first "bar," a godly song, to the tune of "Long Marner," and was admitted to share in the honours to which he had so long aspired. Hans was partial to narrative poetry; but he gained most renown by his plays and farces, some of which extend to seven acts, and which afforded wonderful amusement to the patient Nuremberghers. In the seventy-seventh year of his age, he took an inventory of his poetical stock in trade, and found, according to his narrative, that his works "filled thirty folio volumes, all written with his own hand," and consisted of four thousand two hundred "mastership songs; two hundred and eight comedies, tragedies, and farces; one thousand seven hundred fables, tales, and miscellaneous poems, and seventy-three devotional, military, and love songs; making a sum-total of six thousand and forty-eight pieces, great and small." Out of these he culled as many as filled three massy folios, which were published in the years 1558–61. And another edition being called for, Hans could not resist the temptation of increasing it from his manuscripts. During the whole of his life, he continued to work at his trade, although he found leisure enough to spin out a greater mass of rhyme than was ever produced by one man, if Lope de Vega be excepted. Hans had the satisfaction to find that his "collected works" were received as a welcome gift by the public; and, in the year 1576, he died full of years and honour. We have given these details, because the fame of this indefatigable writer has lately revived in Germany; and a reprint of his works, or at least of a part of them, is in contemplation. The humour of his fabliaux, or "Schwänke," certainly is not contemptible. He laughs lustily, and makes his reader join him: his manner, as far as verse can be compared to prose, is not unlike that of Rabelais, but less grotesque. The Frenchman runs on like the witty and extravagant jester of former times; he rattles his "marotto" until you are stunned with the noise. Hans tells his tale like a convivial burgher fond of his can, and still fonder of drollery.

Some of the older German moralising satires became very popular in foreign countries. This is not the place to speak of the satirical writings which arose out of the Reformation, and to which they proved such powerful auxiliaries. But the works of this description which were produced long before Luther was called into activity, are nevertheless all

stamped with the same character. Their authors were generally deeply-learned, coarse, clear-headed ecclesiastics, primed with the Classics and the Fathers, and yet acquainted with the world; keen observers; dauntless enemies of folly and superstition; but whose wit is dashed with grossness, and whose caustic satire degenerates into abuse.

Caxton's prose translation of Reynard the Fox, in which he says, "I have not added, ne mynished, but have followed, as nyghe as I can, my copye, which was in Dutche"—was printed ten years before any of the Dutch or German editions of this most favourite allegory made its appearance. According to Eccard, a Count Reginard or Reinhard, who lived in the ninth century, was disgraced and banished by King Zwentibold, the son of the Emperor Arnolph. This nobleman having fled to his castle of Durfos, where he contrived to defend himself by his stratagems, gained the name of "the Fox," whilst his own became the popular denomination of that wily animal. Eccard also finds a prototype for the wolf, who, in the allegories of the middle ages, often bears the name of Isengrim, in an Austrian count who rebelled against Zwentibold's father. The exploits of those troublesome vassals are asserted to have been sung in popular ballads, very anciently current in the Low Countries; and these are supposed by the historian to have suggested to Jacquemar's Gielée of Liele, the plan of his "Nouveau Renard." Eccard's conjectures rest upon slender grounds; and the history of the French poems of Gielée, Richebeuf, &c. is foreign to our subject; but it is necessary to premise thus much, as the Saxon "Reynke de Vos" is professedly borrowed from the French language. Henry of Alkmaar, the author, describes himself "as schoolmaster and *teacher of morals* (trecht-leser) to the Duke of Lorraine;" and as it may be conjectured that he found some difficulty in exercising his vocation, he probably thought it advisable to be able to apologise as Caxton did—"If any thyng be said or wreten herein that may greve or dysplease any man, *blame not me, but the foxe; for they bee his wordes, and not myne.*" The existence of Henry of Alkmaar has been called in question; nor has it been ascertained how far the Reynke corresponds with the French romances: it is written with uncommon spirit and freedom, and appears so completely naturalised, that we apprehend nothing but the mere outline of the story can have been imitated from the French. Gottsched has collected a chapter full of "testimonies" in favour of the Reynke, although he entertains some doubts whether James Gulielmus Laurenbergius actually held it to be the next best book to the Bible. Whatever James Gulielmus Laurenbergius may have thought, the English reader will best appreciate its value, when he is told that it nearly equals the humour of the Nonnes Preeste's Tale. The general attack on Bruin the bear (Reynke de Vos, b. i. c. 9.) when the priest and the priest's housekeeper, and Rustcoyl's household and neighbours, swarthy Sanders, and bandy-legged Slobbe, sally forth to assail the luckless beast, who escapes by overturning poor Mistress Jutt in the horse-pond, to the inexpressible dismay of her reverend master, can only be surpassed by the whim and bustle of Chaucer's hue and cry.

Caxton translated from the ancient Dutch or Flemish "Reynaert de Vos." We have compared the first chapters, which agree pretty closely. It was afterwards re-composed and enlarged again and again, in French, and in German, and in Latin, and in English, so that the "most pleasant and delectable history of Reynard the Fox" bears only a resemblance to Alkmaar's poem, which we consider as the original of all the prose

works. The opinion which has been advanced, that he imitated either the Dutch or English prose, appears wholly untenable. Sebastian Brand's Ship of Fools was translated into half the languages in Europe. The preacher, John Gieler of Keysersburg composed one hundred and ten sermons upon the follies of the world, which he delivered at Strasburg, taking the illustrations of his text, "Stultorum infinitus est numerus," from Brand's ample cargo. Geiler gives many minute and whimsical pictures of the time, and is more humorous than the Chancellor of Strasburgh, who writes, however, with plain good sense, and honestly confesses that he deserves the cap and bells full as much as the crew which he has shipped to Narragonia.

Bouterwek remarks, that "the rude inferiority of the German poetry, during the sixteenth century, forms an unpleasing contrast to its state in Italy and Spain, where the Germans might easily have acquired a taste for elegant literature, if they had been gifted with any perception of its beauties. The military and political relations which Charles the Fifth had with Italy, led crowds of the German nobility into that country The same monarch introduced numbers of distinguished Spaniards into Germany, where the Spanish language became well known. And yet, in the age of Ariosto and Cervantes, Hans Sachs continued to rank as the first of German poets; and the only dignified epic which Germany possessed was the stiff allegory of Melchior Pfuitzing." However low the "adventures of the honourable, valorous, and far-famed knight, Sir Tewrdaunekhs," may rank as a romantic poem, it is nevertheless a valuable specimen of the typographical luxury of the Germans,—a taste which was justly encouraged by Maximilian, by whom the graphic arts were employed to transmit to posterity the memorials of the unexampled magnificence of his court. Maximilian, like Francis the First, prided himself in being a "preux chevalier." At the diet of Worms, he did not think it beneath his rank to descend into the lists, and break a lance with the boastful Frenchman who had proffered defiance to the knights of Germany. This monarch showed his partiality for chivalry in the library as well as in the field. He formed a curious collection of ancient manuscripts, which were deposited in the castle of Ambras in the Tyrol, and which were afterwards removed to the Imperial library at Vienna. When "Tewrdaunekhs" first appeared, the known taste of the Emperor gave rise to the supposition that he was the author of the work. This question has been long debated. The authority of Cuspinian, who ascribes it to him, has been considered of great weight; and in the Imperial library there is a rough draught of the first seventy-four chapters in Maximilian's handwriting; in the margin of which he has given careful instructions for the composition of the engravings which ornament the printed copies. This manuscript, however, differs materially from the printed text; and the most probable opinion is, that the Emperor sketched out the plan of the poem, but that it owes its present shape to Melchior Pfuitzing, then provost of St. Sebold's church at Nuremberg. In the course of time, the well-known bibliographer Panzer succeeded to the parsonage of St. Sebold's, and became the inhabitant of the deanery which Pfuitzing had "rebuilt at his own expense." The worthy historian of printing adds, that he often "looked up with pleasure to the inscription on the little stone tablet over his library door" which recorded Pfuitzing's liberality. We can enter into his feelings; for the early editions are certainly amongst the finest specimens of printing which the art has ever produced, although the wood-cuts of Hans Schauffelin, to which the Em-

peror was so attentive, have been rather overrated. The poem acquired just celebrity, although it is dreadfully tedious. It contains an allegorical biography of its reputed author. In the character of Tewrdaunekhs, which, when divested of Pfuitzing's spelling, and written Theuerdank, appears a little less terrific, he is represented as wooing the Princess *Ehrenreich*, daughter of King *Romreich*, under which names we are to recognise Mary of Burgundy, and Charles the Bold, her father. Theuerdank is led into manifold perils by the treacherous advice of the three ministers of Romreich's kingdom, "Furvitting," or Presumption; "Unfalo," or Calamity; and "Neidelhait," or Envy. And it is a joyful event to arrive at the conclusion of the poem, when the whole Cabinet is thus disposed of, — one is hanged; another beheaded; and the third has his neck broken, by being thrown from the top of a high wall.

Poetry long continued thus degraded. The learned lived in Germany like Roman colonists, and looked down upon the barbarous language of the nation with as much contempt as the prefect of Augusta Vindelicorum could have done. The nobility were not devoid of a thirst for knowledge: it was an age of polemics; and those who had embraced the Reformation were anxious to be able to repel the objections of their opponents. Public affairs could not be managed without a knowledge of the civil law. But no flowers grew in the paths which they had chosen. There was no opportunity of cultivating composition or oratory. The provincial states held their meetings with closed doors: and, in the general diet of the Empire, their attention was mainly engrossed by deciding who should sit on a chair, and who on an arm-chair; or in devising such acute expedients for allaying the heart-burnings of offended dignity, as that which placed the Prince Bishop of Osnaburgh on the Quer-banck. An insuperable barrier was raised between the nobility and the *roturiers* (we must be allowed to use the French word, and to exult in observing, that no corresponding term can be found in English); — but if it could have been passed, they would have profited little by being bound 'prentices to the Nuremberg Master-singers. And if any genius arose amongst these industrious professors, their regulations were sure to repress it into dull mediocrity. Amidst all these discouragements, a pleasing ray of poetical feeling may be discovered in these humble productions, the popular song and ballad, by which fame was neither earned nor sought for. The most valuable portion now extant of these compositions, was composed in the sixteenth century. But their history can be traced much higher. The style and manner of our own Border ballads may be reckoned as a portion of the inheritance which we derive from our ancestors, whether they wandered in the Hercynian forest or the wilds of Scandinavia: and in the Lay of Hildebrand we can discover the phraseology of our latest minstrelsy.

> "Her furlaet in lante luttila sitten
> *Prut in bure*, barn unwahsan."

The singular and striking analogy existing between the Danish and Scottish ballads was first discovered by Mr. Jamieson; and in the present work he has resumed the enquiry on a more extended scale.

"The songs mentioned by Tacitus, in his account of the Germans, those collected by the order of Charlemagne, and those which the Goths brought with them out of the East, are now not to be found; yet it is more than probable that much more of them is preserved, in however altered a form, than we are aware of, — in the elder Northern and Teutonic romances, the Danish and Swedish, Scottish and English popular ballads, and those which are sung by old

women and nurses, and hawked about at fairs, in Germany. To show the intimate connection which these have with each other is the principal object in view in this publication; and the materials brought forward for this purpose have in general one merit at least, that of being altogether new, in any form whatever, to most, if not all, of our readers.

"As to the *execution* of the part of this work assigned to the present writer, he begs leave to observe, that he wishes himself to be considered rather as a commentator and editor, than a poetical translator; for his translations themselves have been done, to the best of his ability, in such a manner as to supersede the necessity of illustration; and such pieces have been selected as might best illustrate each other, as well as the general subject of our ballad romance and traditionary poetry. Where there seemed to be occasion for throwing light upon, or preserving the memory of, peculiar usages, superstitions, &c. notes have been subjoined.

"As to the *dialect* (the ancient Scottish) adopted in these versions, he is under considerable anxiety, being aware that it may be received with diffidence, and its propriety questioned. They were written in Livonia, after a residence of upwards of twelve years in England, and four on the Continent; and it will with justice be concluded, that he must have lost much of the natural facility in the use of his native dialect, which is above all necessary for poetical narrative. Of this he is himself sufficiently sensible; and therefore would never have attempted to adapt it to original composition; at the same time that he is far from considering it as a valid objection to his undertaking his present task. Having cultivated an intimate acquaintance with the Scottish language in all its stages, so far back as any monuments of it remain, he might be supposed to have some confidence in his use of it. If in his translations he has blended the dialects of different ages, he has at least endeavoured to do judiciously what his subject seemed to require of him, in order to preserve as entire as possible, in every particular, the costume of his originals. This is one of the strongest features of resemblance between the Northern and Scottish ballad, in which there is found a phraseology which has long been obsolete in both countries, and many terms not understood by those who recite them, and for the meaning of which we must refer to the Norse or Icelandic of the eighth and ninth centuries. On the other points of resemblance, it will not be necessary to say any thing, as they must strike every attentive observer; nor can the style which has been adopted be more satisfactorily justified, than by informing the reader, that the general cast of structure, diction, and idiom, has been so sedulously followed, that, for whole stanzas together, hardly any thing has been altered but the orthography." P. 245, 246.

The lay of Trazemund, which has been edited by Messrs. Grimm, and illustrated with their usual learning and acuteness, is a very ancient specimen of the German ballad. The song of this mysterious pilgrim, who had "wandered through seventy-two kingdoms," and the dark enigmas which he unravels, display the mythological colouring of the Icelandic poetry. In the fourteenth century, the reappearance of the lay of Hildebrand as a narrative ballad evinces the stubborn vitality of popular poetry. And "the Noble Meringer," together with other ballads in simple stanzas, and bearing a nearer resemblance to the English style, continue the history of these compositions in the following age.

The verse, by which leisure is assisted, and work is cheered, — which soothes the cares of the high-born damsel, and makes the spinning-wheel of the cottage maid whirl with redoubled velocity, although usually comprehended under the name of popular poetry, — should be considered as distinct from the narrative ballad. It seems that, in Germany, no specimens of this species of poetry have survived, anterior to the fragments which John Gansbein, the town-clerk of Limburg, has saved from the general wreck, by inserting them in his chronicle. Amongst other particulars, he has carefully noted, that in the year 1360 a general change took place in the fashion of popular song, when the musicians also learned

to "pipe" in a better style than had been hitherto used. The historian inserts a portion of "the Complaint of the Wanton Nun," "as it was sung and piped by the people;" and also preserves the memory of a bare-footed monk, a poor lazar, who, according to the severe but necessary laws of those times, was banished from society, "but who was the best song-writer in the Rheinland."

The war songs of the Swiss are written in a fine strain of genuine ballad poetry. Halb Suter's song on the battle of Sempach (1386), in which Duke Leopold of Austria was defeated and slain, may be given as an instance. The ballad begins in admirable keeping with the omen which warns the husbandman of the approach of the unbidden guests; the description of the Castle of Willison in flames; and the boasts of the invaders: —

> "Die Biene kam geflogen, macht in der Lind ihi nest,
> Es redet der gemline Mann, das dentet frem de Gäst.
> Da sah man wie de Vesto bey Willison hell biennt,
> Den herzog mit dem Necre ein jeder daran kennt.
> Sie redeten zusammen in ihrem Uebermuth,
> Die Schweitzer wollen in Södten, das jung und alte Blut."

The wars of Burgundy established the military fame of the Swiss. Their successes raised their patriotism to the highest pitch of enthusiasm; and the same warriors who had fought in the ranks, afterwards caused their cottages to resound with the strains of honest exultation. The ballads of Veit Weber, who was born out of the pale of the Helvetic confederacy, but who supported the cause with the loyalty of a native, are written with all the flush of victory. He hurries over the field of battle, and points out the flying Burgundians "driven into the lake, and dyeing it with their blood, or climbing into the high trees, from which they are shot down by *the Swiss cross-bow men.*"

The fluctuating fortunes of the Protestants under Charles the Fifth afforded matter for innumerable ditties. The doleful "Lament of the Electress Dame Sybilla of Saxony," and the "Complaint of the Landgrave of Hesse," may be contrasted with others of a less desponding nature; such as were sung by the well-armed lansquenet, playing cards on the drum-head all the while; or, as animated the sturdy citizens of Frankfort and Magdeburg, when they had cleared the churches of papal trumpery, and bade defiance to the Emperor and his Spaniards.

A history of German music is yet wanting. In the few tunes of the "Master-singers" which are published, we cannot distinguish any national or characteristic melody. Some very ancient tunes of Danish ballads have been recovered and collected by Nyerup and Rahbeck. They possess a full and plaintive harmony, although we do not find in them any vestiges of the "symphonious singing" which Giraldus imagined the Northumbrians had borrowed from the Danes and Norwegians. Vocal music became a favourite accomplishment in Germany in the sixteenth century, during which several collections of songs were published. Italian composers came to the assistance of the native amateurs, amongst whom are mentioned the names of Orlando di Lasso, Raynardi, and Mancini. Song writing, unfettered by the rules of the "Masters," thus found encouragement. It was necessary, of course, to suit every taste; and the good wine of the Rheinland, which, by the way, appears to have been the most poetical tract in Germany, came in for its full share of praise. The old German songs, in general, have a pleasing simplicity, and often show a degree of delicacy of sentiment — we do not mean sentimentality — of which there are not the slightest traces in the more bulky productions of

the later part of the sixteenth century. But the few good writers who appeared, perverted their vigorous talents, and employed themselves in coarse and clumsy satires and travesties. At the commencement of the seventeenth century, some attempts were made for the refinement of the German language, and the preservation of its purity. Academies, the old nostrum, were founded: these produced little benefit; but Martin Opitz (1620) in the north of Germany, and his little knot of poetical disciples — and Weckherlin (1618) in the south, rose far above mediocrity.

After the peace of Westphalia, solid learning and the sciences flourished in no ordinary degree; but the art of composition in the vernacular tongue seemed wholly lost. The Germans held an honourable station in the republic of letters; but, until the modern school of poetry and literature was created by Halus and Hagedorn and Gellert, — their stern jurists covered with learned dust, — their philologists and theologians, each wrapped in an ambient atmosphere of tobacco smoke, — their chemists, worn down and parched with the heat of the laboratory, and all speaking a barbarous form of a dead language — formed an uncouth group by the side of the polished and courtly wits of France, and the graceful dignity of their English rivals.

THE POETRY OF RUSSIA, BATAVIA, SPAIN, POLAND, SERVIA, AND OF THE MAGYARS.*

The translator is to poetry what the adventurous merchant is to commerce. He circulates the produce of thought, varies our intellectual banquet, teaches us that some accession to our stores may be derived even from those quarters which we had regarded as the most sterile and unpromising, and thus adds another link to the chain of social and kindly feelings which should bind man to his fellows. In this commerce of mind few have laboured more assiduously than Dr. Bowring. At one time "he hath an argosy bound for Tripoli, another for the Indies, a third for Mexico, a fourth for England" — ventures, in short, "enough to bear a royal merchant down" — and yet, with the exception of one cargo under Dutch colours, where he appears to have had a partner, he seems to trust entirely to his own taste and research in the selection of his commodities. His varied and almost Mithridatic acquaintance with the languages of modern Europe, extending even to their less classical or almost forgotten dialects and that liberal spirit in literature, which so extensive a field of enquiry is sure to produce, seemed peculiarly to mark him out as one fitted to transfer to his country those strains which had conferred celebrity on their authors in their own, or which, though their origin and authorship are lost in the darkness of antiquity, had long cheered the peasant in his sledge amidst the frozen snow, or been associated with the jollity

* 1. Specimens of the Russian Poets. Translated by John Bowring, LL.D. 2. Batavian Anthology, or Specimens of the Dutch Poets. By John Bowring, LL.D. 3. Ancient Poetry and Romances of Spain. Selected and translated by John Bowring, LL.D. and H. S. Van Dyk. 4. Specimens of the Polish Poets. By John Bowring, LL.D. 5. Servian Popular Poetry. Translated by John Bowring, LL.D. 6. Poetry of the Magyars. By John Bowring, LL.D.— Vol. lii. p. 322. January, 1831.

of the harvest and the vintage, or the more tranquil mirth of the cottage fire.

It is true, it may be said that no very accurate idea of the poetry of a foreign nation, separated from ourselves by seas and continents, and still farther separated in mind by diversity of habits and feelings, can be gained by the labours of any one translator; and the observation is well-founded to a certain extent. The edifice he seeks to illuminate is, no doubt, too vast to be fully enlightened by a solitary torch; but at least it is probable that, in moving with him along its vast halls and long arches, the light he carries will strike occasionally on objects of splendour or value; that our eyes will catch dim glimpses of treasures in its inner recesses — sudden openings into far-off gardens, the trees of which, like those which dazzled Aladdin in the cave, seem bright with the tints of the diamond, the ruby, and the emerald; and that the result of this hasty glance may be a desire to return, and to investigate for ourselves, and with more leisure and minuteness, the scenes of which we have caught these dim but pleasing outlines. He who transfers a single strain of true and natural poetry, however simple, however brief, from another language to ours, performs no mean service to literature, and, it may be, to the interests of civilisation in general. He has thrown, as it were, the first plank over the gulf which separated two nations, — has taught them that they have feelings, "eyes, organs, dimensions, affections, passions," in common, — has awakened a spirit of literary enterprise, and pointed out, if he cannot guide us through, the promised land. Other adventurers will soon throng after him; a broader bridge will be thrown over the channel that divided them; an exchange of feelings and associations may take place; the old may impart to the new some portion of the polish which long civilisation has produced; while it receives in return a new infusion of the freshness, rapidity, and wild vigour which characterise an infant literature; thus bartering its Persian ornaments of gold and silver to receive repayment in a Spartan coinage of iron.

The interest of Dr. Bowring's earliest work — his *Specimens of the Russian Poets* — was in a great measure that arising from surprise; from discovering that, in the country which, until the days of Peter the Great, had never made its voice heard among the dynasties of Europe, there had grown up, almost with the suddenness of an exhalation, a poetical literature betraying no marks of its barbaric origin; possessing, in fact, the very qualities which are most commonly found associated with a long-established literature, — light, graceful, equable, rather than startling, either by its beauties or its faults; moral, didactic, tender, or satirical, rather than narrative, martial, or mystical: in short, so little hyperborean in its general aspect, that but for some occasional traits of nationality, which give it a certain distinctive and original character, we had great difficulty in believing that any thing so trim and so polished could have been imported from the rough shores of the Don and the Wolga. Perhaps, however, there was but little room for surprise when the peculiar circumstances of Russia were adverted to. Called into existence as a European power, by the genius of one man, she had to borrow every thing from civilised Europe — arts, arms, philosophy, learning — and it was but natural she should borrow her poetry with the rest. Being, as it were, at the time almost in a state of poetical nudity, it was far more easy for her to step into the ready-made, though somewhat faded, habiliments which France, England, and Germany politely pressed upon her acceptance, than to construct a national costume for herself out of the coarse

and scanty materials which had constituted her wardrobe in former and ruder centuries; and so, slipping his person unceremoniously into English pantaloons, and a French *robe de chambre*, the Russian poet went sideling up the walks of Parnassus with a meershaum in his mouth, Young's *Night Thoughts* in his hand, and Voltaire in his pocket, all unconscious that the Monmouth-street air of his habiliments was visible to every myrmidon that guarded that quarter of Apollo's domain.

Let us not, however, be unjust to the high merit of some of the specimens of Russian poetry, to which we were introduced by Dr. Bowring. We cannot certainly sympathise with him to the full extent of his admiration; for it is an infallible effect of translation, that the translator acquires an undue attachment to the authors on whom he has exercised his powers; and as in general we are apt to estimate the merit of our own works according to the labour which we have bestowed upon them, it may frequently happen that pieces of inferior merit may be rated higher than the works of greater poets in the scale of the translator; simply because it has required a greater exertion of his own skill and ingenuity to bring them into shape, and to present them in an attractive dress to an English reader. We cannot, therefore, but regret, that Russia, in borrowing from other countries, did not labour to impart to the materials she imported a stronger air of nationality — to efface more completely the former die from the coin, and to stamp on it her own image and superscription; and that more use was not made on the whole of her national traditions and historical annals: but we admit, at the same time, that many causes have existed, and do exist, in Russia, calculated to narrow the field on which originality can be displayed, and to contract the sphere of feeling and thought; and we willingly do justice to the merits of such men as Derzhaven, Lomonosov, and Zhuskovsky. The ballad of "Catherine," in particular, by the latter, wild and spectral like Bürger's "Lenore," but national in all its pictures and allusions, scarcely loses by a comparison with its Teutonic prototype: and some of the national songs which close the second volume, brief, artless, tender, and picturesque, seem deserving of the high eulogiums bestowed upon them by the translator. "They are no subjects for criticism," observes Dr. Bowring; "for criticism cannot reach them — it cannot abstract one voice from the chorus, nor persuade the village youths and maidens that the measure is false, or the music is discordant." "The rude melody, often gentle and plaintive, in which they find utterance, still vibrates in my ear. I ask for them no admiration — they are the delight of millions."

A different object from that which he had in view in his Russian selections was to be effected by the *Batavian Anthology* of Dr. Bowring— not to introduce to our notice a nation, in the infancy of literature and civilisation, making her first timid essay in the paths of poetry; but one long celebrated in learning, science, philosophy, and arms, where hard-won Liberty had early made her cradle and home, and still dwelt, though in a more splendid mansion, and amidst the modern luxuries and refinements spread around her by an abundant commerce. It was to dispel the prejudices supposed to exist among ourselves as to the poetry of Holland, and to satisfy the critic by experiment that the country of William I., of Grotius, Erasmus, and Rembrandt, could not be without its poets, as well as its painters, philosophers, and statesmen. This attempt, however, we cannot help thinking, was less successful than its predecessor; not through any fault on the part of Dr. Bowring, (for its execution was, on the whole, more skilful, but that, in truth, the opinion which had been formed of the poets

of Holland, though exaggerated, was in the main correct;—that although occasional magnificence and constant purity of taste characterise the choruses of Vendel; though Cats be nervous, simple, and sententious; though Decker, Brederode, and Westerbain are often touching and natural—a great number of the specimens exhibited by him rather sunk beneath than rose above mediocrity; and that, consequently, the general aspect of the Dutch Parnassus, even as placed by him in its best point of view, too much resembled that of their own gardens—all very smooth and pleasing, and irreproachable in point of neatness, with here and there, too, some stately and umbrageous trees, but seldom varying from a dead level, and with a temperature, on the whole, rising but little above freezing. Dr. Bowring will perhaps think we do injustice to his favourites, and we are willing to hope that his supplementary volume may exhibit the beauties of Batavia in a more favourable light. Meantime, we willingly acknowledge the skill with which many of his own translations are executed.†

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From the amphibious world of Holland —

> "The slow canal, the yellow-blossom'd vale,
> The willow-tufted bank, and gliding sail"—

Dr. Bowring turned suddenly to a more striking region of song—to the deep valleys and sunburnt sierras, the vineyards, the Moorish palaces and Gothic ruins of Spain; to the romantic chronicles of her ancient kings, so rich in eventful changes and picturesque details; to the magic names of the Cid, of Bernardo del Carpio, and of that train of heroes who hold an equivocal position on the debatable land between truth and fiction; to Granada, with its Alhambra, Albaycin, and Generalife, its Zegris and Abencerrages, its chivalry, its learning, and its splendour; to those heroic ballads, where the light and graceful Arabesque wreathes itself, like a vine, round the massive solidity of the Gothic fabric which it decorates; and to that vast collection of national songs, nameless themselves, and touching the imagination and the heart with a nameless but powerful spell. His object now was neither to awaken our interest for an infant literature, nor to disabuse us of prejudices against an old one; but rather to justify to ourselves the prepossessions of which we were conscious towards the literature of the Peninsula. He wished to afford evidence that there was a reality in the dreams which we connected with these shores of old romance, and to make us acquainted with that peculiar anonymous ballad literature, the glory of Spain, which, more than even her laboured productions, evinces the diffusion of a high tone of poetical feeling among her inhabitants, and much of which had fortunately been rescued from oblivion and collected so early as 1510. In this field, no doubt, the translator could not, as in the case of his Russian and Batavian anthologies, boast of having led the way. He had been preceded by Mr. Lockhart, who had translated, with great vigour, and with a fine vein of chivalrous feeling, many of the best of the historical romances. But Dr. Bowring's work, from its variety, and, in particular, from the numerous and sometimes extremely happy translations it contained of those little fragments and snatches of song, which had been in a great measure overlooked by his predecessor, must be regarded as a valuable supplement to the *Ancient Spanish Ballads*.

Scarcely has this peninsular pageant of chivalry passed by, when the

† See p. 326. of the review for some pretty stanzas from one of Brederode's songs, which the critic considers to resemble the manner of Herrick.

scene is changed to the banks of the Seva and the Danube — to Servia and Hungary. The poetical literature of Servia seems even more singular than that of Spain itself. Much of the Spanish poetry was traditional, till collected in the *Cancionero* and *Romancero General;* but that of Servia is entirely so. Bequeathed from mouth to mouth, without the aid of manuscripts or printing, the same songs that celebrated the exploits of Marco, or lamented the fatal battle of Kosova, (the Servian Xeres de la Frontera,) which delivered over the country to the tyranny of Amurath, are still, with slender variations, the popular poetry of the country. Simple and unpretending, they scarcely appear to the natives deserving of the name of poetry — a title which they seem to think can only be claimed by longer and more ambitious effusions. Goethe, who has devoted considerable attention to the poetry of Servia, observes, that when some Servians, who had visited Vienna, were requested to write down the songs they had sung, they expressed the greatest surprise that such simple poetry and music as theirs should possess any interest for intelligent and cultivated minds. They apprehended, they said, that the artless compositions of their country would be the subject of scorn or ridicule to those whose poetry was so polished and sublime.

Simple, however, and unadorned as it is, we have no hesitation in saying, that it appears to us the most interesting and original to which Dr. Bowring has yet directed his attention. The language of Servia, a derivative from the old Church Slavonic, modified by the vicinity of Greece and Italy, seems early to have been softened down into a perfect instrument for poetry and music. From the Turks, too, their ancient foes, and latterly their conquerors, the Servians borrowed many additions to their vocabulary; while even the hostile relations subsisting between the two countries tended strongly to impress upon its literature an Oriental character. In this, in fact, it resembled, to a certain extent, that of Spain, though the intercourse between the two countries was of a far less intimate and kindly nature, and the Turks, with whom they maintained the struggle, a very different race from the polished Moors of Granada. Enough remained to impart an Oriental colouring to many of its pictures, and to vary and extend the field of its allusions.

Till within these few years, when a large mass of the national songs and ballads of Servia was collected by Vuck, and committed to paper, either from early recollections, or from the repetition of Servian minstrels, no part of these national compositions had been given to the public. The part which has thus been collected and published, we are informed, forms but a very small portion of the stores which still exist unrecorded among the peasantry. The historical ballads are written in lines of five trochaics, and are always sung to the accompaniment of a simple three-stringed instrument called the guzla, as the Spanish ballads generally were to that of the guitar. At the end of every verse, the singer drops his voice, and mutters a short cadence. The emphatic passages are chanted in a louder tone. "I cannot describe," says Wessely, who has translated, with great fidelity, a selection of their nuptial songs into German, "the pathos with which these songs are sometimes sung. I have witnessed crowds surrounding an old blind singer, and every cheek was wet with tears." Often, like the Arabian story-tellers, they stop in their ballads at the most interesting point, till they have appealed to the generosity of their audience; wisely thinking that they have quite as much to expect from their curiosity as their compassion. The ballads which form their stock in trade possess some features which distinguish them from those of other countries. They are more condensed and straightforward than the Spanish, telling their

story with more rapidity of movement, and less of ornament; while they are almost free of those unmeaning repetitions and lines inserted for the mere purpose of eking out the rhyme, which deform so many of the most pathetic of our own ballads. In one respect, however, they assimilate but too closely with our own: in those savage atrocities, and sometimes almost meaningless cruelties, which they recount with a calm apathy; and in instances of treachery, which reflect no great credit on "the goodly usance of those antique times." The influence of a very peculiar mythology breathes over them all; in which the most remarkable agent is a spirit called the Vila — a beautiful but terrible being, of vast powers, which she employs capriciously or malevolently — who haunts the mountains, caves, and forests, and utters her mandates and denunciations from their recesses. Their most celebrated hero is Marco, a Scythian likeness of the Grecian Hercules; a name, like Conrad's, "linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes;" for he murders in cold blood the Moorish maiden who had been his deliverer, for no better reason than that he was frightened at her ebon visage and ivory teeth. This savage warrior, who is represented as endowed with supernatural strength, rides a steed (Sharaz) a century and a half old, and dies himself at the age of three hundred, apparently of nothing at all. These extravagant conceptions, however, afford no fair specimen of the Servian ballads.†

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On the amatory poems of the Servians, Goethe has bestowed a strong and merited tribute of admiration. He observes, that, when taken as a whole, they cannot but be deemed of singular beauty: they exhibit the expressions of passionate, overflowing, and contented affection; they are full of shrewdness and spirit: delight and surprise are admirably portrayed, and there is in all a marvellous sagacity in subduing difficulties, and in obtaining an end; a natural, but, at the same time, vigorous and energetic tone; sympathies and sensibilities, without wordy exaggeration, but which, notwithstanding, are decorated with poetical imagery, and imaginative beauty; a correct picture of Servian life and manners: every thing, in short, which gives to passion the force of truth, and to external scenery the character of reality.‡

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The latest of Dr. Bowring's contributions to his European Anthology is his *Poetry of the Magyars*. For this volume he seems to think it more necessary, than on any previous occasion, to bespeak the forbearance and candour of his readers; and, perhaps, as compared either with its Servian predecessor, or the *Ancient Poetry of Spain*, its effect will be felt to be comparatively monotonous; though this result is unquestionably owing to no fault of the translator. On the contrary, his skill in the mechanism of translation has, as might have been expected, increased by practice; the propensity to ornament the original by epithet or antithesis, which is the besetting sin of translators, he seems to have in a great measure weaned himself from, and to have adhered as closely as the analogy of the languages and the difficulties of versification would permit, to the grand principle of exhibiting the author — as he is. But, though Hungary is associated with some interesting historical recollections, and though a certain interest must always be awakened in favour of the literature of a

† The reviewer adduces, as an instance of the powers of narrative displayed in the Servian ballads, one entitled "Zelitza and her Brothers," p. 330—331.

‡ A very short and simple composition of this character is quoted by the critic, beginning, "O! if I were a mountain streamlet,"&c. p. 333.

language now almost extinct, and which it seems the wish of its Austrian masters to abolish altogether, Dr. Bowring himself seems hardly to claim for them any very exalted station upon his *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Even before the liberties and energies of Hungary were overthrown by the battle of the White Mountain in 1620, though the Bohemian language appears to have been in a state of high cultivation, and the number of its pure writers considerable, its poets are undeserving of much note; nor do their collections of fugitive and anonymous poetry ever appear to have been either interesting or numerous. With that fatal battle, every thing in literature, politics, or church government, which could give to Hungary an independent national character, was at an end; the charter of its liberties, contained in the famous letter of his majesty, was cancelled, and the best blood of Bohemia poured upon the scaffold. Since the day, says the old cellar-master in the Piccolomini,

> "When Palsgrave Frederick lost his crown and kingdom,
> Its faith was shorn of chancel and of altar;
> Its banish'd brethren look'd upon their homes
> From other shores; and even the Imperial letter,
> With his own hand the Emperor cut in two."

Amidst these scenes of banishment, proscription, and blood, and this prostration of national spirit and independence, the poetical genius of Hungary was little likely to display itself in any lofty or enduring monument of taste and skill, or even in the preservation or adaptation of those brief but energetic and spirit-stirring traditions which form so important an element in the national poetry of Spain. And at last the extinction of the Transylvanian court, and the transference of the *élite* of society to Vienna, completed that desolation which the early subjugation of Bohemia had begun.

The greater part of the Hungarian poetry, therefore, as might be expected, is of an imitative cast. Many of their best poets wrote in Latin; but even in those who still used the neglected Magyar language, the influence of foreign literature is sufficiently obvious. Sweetness and polish, rather than strength, are its characteristics; their verses reflect that fine ear for music and harmony, which seems to be a distinguishing quality in the Bohemian character. Their thoughts, though seldom grand, are generally natural and unexaggerated; their imagery appropriate, though confined in its range. In the elegiac and Anacreontic, many of their poets appear to have been extremely successful; and not a few of them have used the difficult Sapphic stanza with a grace and mastery of which we know scarcely any parallel, except in some of the Rimas of Villegas. In the sonnet, also, they have been no unworthy followers of the classic neatness, compression, and melody, of their Italian prototypes. In short, whatever could be done by care, by polish, by good taste and good feeling, they have done well; though, in the loftier walks of poetry, they have not been very enterprising or successful adventurers.

In conclusion, we cannot but congratulate Dr. Bowring upon the accessions which he has made to our information as to the poetical literature of other countries, and acknowledge the pleasure we have derived from many of the specimens which he has introduced to our notice. To himself, we doubt not, the work has been a labour of love. "I have never," says he "left the ark of my country, but with the wish to return to it, bearing fresh olive-branches of peace, and fresh garlands of poetry. I never yet visited the land where I found not much to love, to learn, to imitate, to honour. I never yet saw man utterly despoiled of his humanities. In Europe, at least, there are no moral nor intellectual wilder-

nesses." He has done much by his exertions to impress others with the same conviction; to awaken our sympathies for nations who are endeavouring to form to themselves a future poetical literature, or to preserve the wrecks of a past; and to correct those errors or prejudices with which older and more established literatures have been regarded.

To one, too, who himself possesses a poetical imagination, there is a gratification of no common kind, in endeavouring to save from forgetfulness the names of so many poets "immeritis mori." When Xerxes reviewed his army from the top of Mount Athos, he is said to have wept at the reflection how few of all that vast multitude would, in the course of a short time, be in existence. A feeling of the same kind must often occur to the minds of those who contemplate from that elevated point of view which Dr. Bowring has occupied, the wide field of European poetry. How small the number of those labourers in the vineyard, who are now seen instinct with activity and gay hope, will survive the lapse of a few years! how many, even in their own lifetime, are doomed to follow the funeral of their fame! how very few can even hope to make their way beyond the limited sphere of their own country! But the poet sympathises with the poet; and though his single efforts may not be able to save many from that oblivion which is overtaking them, it will still be to him a proud reflection, if he has succeeded in rescuing from forgetfulness one strain which should have been bequeathed to immortality, or even in reviving to a second short course of posthumous existence, some names over which that dark and silent tide seemed to have closed for ever.

THE LAKE SCHOOL OF POETRY.*

POETRY has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question; and that many profess to be entirely devoted to it, who have no *good works* to produce in support of their pretensions. The catholic poetical church, too, has worked but few miracles since the first ages of its establishment; and has been more prolific, for long time, of Doctors, than of Saints: it has had its corruptions and reformation also, and has given birth to an infinite variety of heresies and errors, the followers of which have hated and persecuted each other as cordially as other bigots.

The author who is now before us belongs to a *sect* of poets, that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years, and is looked upon, we believe, as one of its chief champions and apostles. The peculiar doctrines of this sect, it would not, perhaps, be very easy to explain; but, that they are *dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism, is admitted, and proved indeed, by the whole tenor of their compositions. Though they lay claim, we believe, to a creed and a revelation of their own, there can be little doubt that their doctrines are of *German* origin, and have been derived from some of the great modern reformers in that country. Some of their leading principles, indeed, are probably of an earlier date, and seem to have been borrowed from the

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* Southey's Thalaba. — Vol. i. p. 63. October, 1802.

great apostle of Geneva. As Mr. Southey is the first author of this persuasion that has yet been brought before us for judgment, we cannot discharge our inquisitorial office conscientiously, without premising a few words upon the nature and tendency of the tenets he has helped to promulgate.

The disciples of this school boast much of its originality, and seem to value themselves very highly, for having broken loose from the bondage of ancient authority, and reasserted the independence of genius. Originality, however, we are persuaded, is rarer than mere alteration; and a man may change a good master for a bad one, without finding himself at all nearer to independence. That our new poets have abandoned the old models, may certainly be admitted; but we have not been able to discover that they have yet created any models of their own; and are very much inclined to call in question the worthiness of those to which they have transferred their admiration. The productions of this school, we conceive, are so far from being entitled to the praise of originality, that they cannot be better characterised, than by an enumeration of the sources from which their materials have been derived. The greater part of them, we apprehend, will be found to be composed of the following elements: 1. The antisocial principles and distempered sensibility of Rousseau — his discontent with the present constitution of society — his paradoxical morality, and his perpetual hankerings after some unattainable state of voluptuous virtue and perfection. 2. The simplicity and energy (*horresco referens*) of Kotzebue and Schiller. 3. The homeliness and harshness of some of Cowper's language and versification, interchanged occasionally with the *innocence* of Ambrose Philips, or the quaintness of Quarles and Dr. Donne. From the diligent study of these few originals, we have no doubt that an entire art of poetry may be collected, by the assistance of which the very *gentlest* of our readers may soon be qualified to compose a poem as correctly versified as Thalaba, and to deal out sentiment and description, with all the sweetness of Lambe, and all the magnificence of Coleridge.

The authors of whom we are now speaking have among them, unquestionably, a very considerable portion of poetical talent, and have consequently been enabled to seduce many into an admiration of the false taste (as it appears to us) in which most of their productions are composed. They constitute, at present, the most formidable conspiracy that has lately been formed against sound judgment in matters poetical; and are entitled to a larger share of our censorial notice, than could be spared for an individual delinquent. We shall hope for the indulgence of our readers, therefore, in taking this opportunity to enquire a little more particularly into their merits, and to make a few remarks upon those peculiarities which seem to be regarded by their admirers as the surest proofs of their excellence.

Their most distinguishing symbol is undoubtedly an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language. They disdain to make use of the common poetical phraseology, or to ennoble their diction by a selection of fine or dignified expressions. There would be too much *art* in this for that great love of nature with which they are all of them inspired; and their sentiments, they are determined, shall be indebted, for their effect, to nothing but their intrinsic tenderness or elevation. There is something very noble and conscientious, we will confess, in this plan of composition; but the misfortune is, that there are passages in all poems, that can neither be pathetic nor sublime; and that, on these occasions, a

neglect of the embellishments of language is very apt to produce absolute meanness and insipidity. The language of passion, indeed, can scarcely be deficient in elevation; and when an author is wanting in that particular, he may commonly be presumed to have failed in the truth, as well as in the dignity, of his expression. The case, however, is extremely different with the subordinate parts of a composition; with the narrative and description, that are necessary to preserve its connection; and the explanation, that must frequently prepare us for the great scenes and splendid passages. In these, all the requisite ideas may be conveyed, with sufficient clearness, by the meanest and most negligent expressions; and, if magnificence or beauty is ever to be observed in them, it must have been introduced from some other motive than that of adapting the style to the subject. It is in such passages, accordingly, that we are most frequently offended with low and inelegant expressions; and that the language, which was intended to be simple and natural, is found oftenest to degenerate into mere slovenliness and vulgarity. It is in vain, too, to expect that the meanness of those parts may be redeemed by the excellence of others. A poet, who aims at all at sublimity or pathos, is like an actor in a high tragic character, and must sustain his dignity throughout, or become altogether ridiculous. We are apt enough to laugh at the mock-majesty of those whom we know to be but common mortals in private; and cannot permit Hamlet to make use of a single provincial intonation, although it should only be in his conversation with the grave-diggers.

The followers of simplicity are, therefore, at all times in danger of occasional degradation; but the simplicity of this new school seems intended to ensure it. *Their* simplicity does not consist, by any means, in the rejection of glaring or superfluous ornament, — in the substitution of elegance for splendour, or in that refinement of art which seeks concealment in its own perfection. It consists, on the contrary, in a very great degree, in the positive and *bonâ fide* rejection of art altogether, and in the bold use of those rude and negligent expressions which would be banished by a little discrimination. One of their own authors, indeed, has very ingenuously set forth, (in a kind of manifesto that preceded one of their most flagrant acts of hostility,) that it was their capital object "to adapt to the uses of poetry the ordinary language of conversation among the middling and lower orders of the people." What advantages are to be gained by the success of this project, we confess ourselves unable to conjecture. The language of the higher and more cultivated orders may fairly be presumed to be better than that of their inferiors: at any rate, it has all those associations in its favour, by means of which, a style can ever appear beautiful or exalted; and is adapted to the purposes of poetry by having been long consecrated to its use. The language of the vulgar, on the other hand, has all the opposite associations to contend with; and must seem unfit for poetry (if there were no other reason) merely because it has scarcely ever been employed in it. A great genius may indeed overcome these disadvantages; but we can scarcely conceive that he should court them. We may excuse a certain homeliness of language in the productions of a ploughman or a milk-woman; but we cannot bring ourselves to admire it in an author who has had occasion to indite odes to his college bell, and inscribe hymns to the Penates.

But the mischief of this new system is not confined to the depravation of language only; it extends to the sentiments and emotions, and leads

to the debasement of all those feelings which poetry is designed to communicate. It is absurd, to suppose that an author should make use of the language of the vulgar to express the sentiments of the refined. His professed object, in employing that language, is to bring his compositions nearer to the true standard of nature; and his intention to copy the sentiments of the lower orders is implied in his resolution to make use of their style. Now, the different classes of society have each of them a distinct character, as well as a separate idiom; and the names of the various passions to which they are subject respectively, have a signification that varies essentially, according to the condition of the persons to whom they are applied. The love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is in itself a different emotion, from the love, or grief, or anger of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench. The things themselves are radically and obviously distinct; and the representation of them is calculated to convey a very different train of sympathies and sensations to the mind. The question, therefore, comes simply to be — which of them is the most proper object for poetical imitation? It is needless for us to answer a question, which the practice of all the world has long ago decided irrevocably. The poor and vulgar may interest us, in poetry, by their *situation*: but never, we apprehend, by any sentiments that are peculiar to their condition, and still less by any language that is characteristic of it. The truth is, that it is impossible to copy their diction or their sentiments correctly, in a serious composition; and this, not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind; and a language, fitted for their expression, can still more rarely form any part of their "ordinary conversation." The low-bred heroes and interesting rustics of poetry have no sort of affinity to the real vulgar of this world; they are imaginary beings, whose characters and language are in contrast with their situation; and please those, who can be pleased with them, by the marvellous, and not by the nature of such a combination. In serious poetry, a man of the middling or lower order *must necessarily* lay aside a great deal of his ordinary language; he must avoid errors in grammar and orthography; and steer clear of the cant of particular professions, and of every impropriety that is ludicrous or disgusting: nay, he must speak in good verse, and observe all the graces in prosody and collocation. After all this, it may not be very easy to say how we are to find him out to be a low man, or what marks can remain of the ordinary language of conversation in the inferior orders of society. If there be any phrases that are not used in good society, they will appear as blemishes in the composition, no less palpably than errors in syntax or quantity; and if there be no such phrases, the style cannot be characteristic of that condition of life, the language of which it professes to have adopted. All approximation to that language, in the same manner, implies a deviation from that purity and precision, which no one, we believe, ever violated spontaneously.

It has been argued, indeed, (for men will argue in support of what they do not venture to practise,) that as the middling and lower orders of society constitute by far the greater part of mankind, so their feelings and expressions should interest more extensively, and may be taken, more fairly than any other, for the standards of what is natural and true. To this it seems obvious to answer, that the arts that aim at exciting admiration and delight do not take their models from what is ordinary, but

from what is excellent; and that our interest in the representation of any event does not depend upon our familiarity with the original, but on its intrinsic importance, and the celebrity of the parties it concerns. The sculptor employs his art in delineating the graces of Antinous or Apollo, and not in the representation of those ordinary forms that belong to the crowd of his admirers. When a chieftain perishes in battle, his followers mourn more for him than for thousands of their equals that may have fallen around him.

After all, it must be admitted, that there is a class of persons (we are afraid they cannot be called *readers*), to whom the representation of vulgar manners, in vulgar language, will afford much entertainment. We are afraid, however, that the ingenious writers who supply the hawkers and ballad-singers, have very nearly monopolised that department, and are probably better qualified to hit the taste of their customers, than Mr. Southey, or any of his brethren, can yet pretend to be. To fit them for the higher task of original composition, it would not be amiss if they were to undertake a translation of Pope or Milton into the vulgar tongue, for the benefit of those children of nature.

There is still another disagreeable effect of this affected simplicity, which, though of less importance than those which have been already noticed, it may yet be worth while to mention: this is, the extreme difficulty of supporting the same tone of expression throughout, and the inequality that is consequently introduced into the texture of the composition. To an author of reading and education, it is a style that must always be assumed and unnatural, and one from which he will be perpetually tempted to deviate. He will rise, therefore, every now and then, above the level to which he has professedly degraded himself; and make amends for that transgression, by a fresh effort of descension. His composition, in short, will be like that of a person who is attempting to speak in an obsolete or provincial dialect; he will betray himself by expressions of occasional purity and elegance, and exert himself to efface that impression, by passages of unnatural meanness or absurdity.

In making these strictures on the perverted taste for simplicity that seems to distinguish our modern school of poetry, we have no particular allusion to Mr. Southey, or the production now before us: on the contrary, he appears to us to be less addicted to this fault than most of his fraternity; and if we were in want of examples to illustrate the preceding observations, we should certainly look for them in the effusions of that poet who commemorates, with so much effect, the chattering of Harry Gibbs's teeth; tells the tale of the one-eyed huntsman "who had a cheek like a cherry;" and beautifully warns his studious friend of the risk he ran of "growing double."

At the same time, it is impossible to deny that the author of the "English Eclogues" is liable to a similar censure; and few persons, we believe, will peruse the following verses (taken almost at random from the Thalaba), without acknowledging that he still continues to deserve it.

"At midnight Thalaba started up,
For he felt that the ring on his finger was moved.
He called on Allah aloud,
And he called on the Prophet's name.
Moath arose in alarm,
'What ails thee, Thalaba?' he cried,
'Is the robber of night at hand?'
'Dost thou not see,' the youth exclaimed,
'A spirit in the tent?'

Moath looked round, and said,
' The moon-beam shines in the tent,
I see thee stand in the light,
And thy shadow is black on the ground.'
Thalaba answered not.
' Spirit!' he cried, ' what brings thee here?' &c.

WOMAN.

Go not among the tombs, Old Man!
There is a madman there.

OLD MAN.

Will he harm me if I go?

WOMAN.

Not he, poor miserable man!
But 'tis a wretched sight to see
His utter wretchedness.
For all day long he lies on a grave,
And never is he seen to weep,
And never is he heard to groan,
Nor ever at the hour of prayer
Bends his knee, nor moves his lips.
I have taken him food for charity,
And never a word he spake;
But yet so ghastly he looked
That I have awaken'd at night," &c.

Now, this style, we conceive, possesses no one character of excellence: it is feeble, low, and disjointed; without elegance, and without dignity; the offspring, we should imagine, of mere indolence and neglect; or the unhappy fruit of a system that would teach us to undervalue that vigilance and labour which sustained the loftiness of Milton, and gave energy and direction to the pointed and fine propriety of Pope.

The *style* of our modern poets, is that, no doubt, by which they are most easily distinguished: but their genius has also an internal character; and the peculiarities of their taste may be discovered, without the assistance of their diction. Next after great familiarity of language, there is nothing that appears to them so meritorious as perpetual exaggeration of thought. There must be nothing moderate, natural, or easy, about their sentiments. There must be a " qu'il mourut, " and a " let there be light," in every line: and all their characters must be in agonies and ecstasies, from their entrance to their exit. To those who are acquainted with their productions, it is needless to speak of the fatigue that is produced by this unceasing summons to admiration, or of the compassion which is excited by the spectacle of these eternal strainings and distortions. Those authors appear to forget, that a whole poem cannot be made up of striking passages; and that the sensations produced by sublimity are never so powerful and entire as when they are allowed to subside and revive, in a slow and spontaneous succession. It is delightful, now and then, to meet with a rugged mountain or a roaring stream; but where there is no sunny slope, nor shaded plain, to relieve them — where all is beetling cliff and yawning abyss, and the landscape presents nothing on every side but prodigies and terrors — the head is apt to grow giddy, and the heart to languish for the repose and security of a less elevated region.

The effect even of genuine sublimity, therefore, is impaired by the injudicious frequency of its exhibition, and the omission of those intervals and breathing-places, at which the mind should be permitted to recover from its perturbation or astonishment: but where it has been summoned upon

a false alarm, and disturbed in the orderly course of its attention, by an impotent attempt at elevation, the consequences are still more disastrous. There is nothing so ridiculous (at least for a poet) as to fail in great attempts. If the reader foresaw the failure, he may receive some degree of mischievous satisfaction from its punctual occurrence; if he did not, he will be vexed and disappointed; and in both cases, he will very speedily be disgusted and fatigued. It would be going too far, certainly, to maintain, that our modern poets have never succeeded in their persevering endeavours at elevation and emphasis; but it is a melancholy fact, that their successes bear but a small proportion to their miscarriages; and that the reader who has been promised an energetic sentiment, or sublime allusion, must often be contented with a very miserable substitute. Of the many contrivances they employ to give the appearance of uncommon force and animation to a very ordinary conception, the most usual is, to wrap it up in a veil of mysterious and unintelligible language, which flows past with so much solemnity, that it is difficult to believe it conveys nothing of any value. Another device for improving the effect of a cold idea is, to embody it in a verse of unusual harshness and asperity. Compound words, too, of a portentous sound and conformation, are very useful in giving an air of energy and originality; and a few lines of scripture written out into verse from the original prose, have been found to have a very happy effect upon those readers to whom they have the recommendation of novelty.

The qualities of style and imagery, however, form but a small part of the characteristics by which a literary faction is to be distinguished. The subject and object of their compositions, and the principles and opinions they are calculated to support, constitute a far more important criterion, and one to which it is usually altogether as easy to refer. Some poets are sufficiently described as the flatterers of greatness and power, and others as the champions of independence. One set of writers is known by its antipathy to decency and religion; another, by its methodistical cant and intolerance. Our new school of poetry has a moral character also; though it may not be possible, perhaps, to delineate it quite so concisely.

A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society, seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments. Instead of contemplating the wonders and the pleasures which civilisation has created for mankind, they are perpetually brooding over the disorders by which its progress has been attended. They are filled with horror and compassion at the sight of poor men spending their blood in the quarrels of princes, and brutifying their sublime capabilities in the drudgery of unremitting labour. For all sorts of vice and profligacy in the lower orders of society, they have the same virtuous horror, and the same tender compassion. While the existence of these offences overpowers them with grief and confusion, they never permit themselves to feel the smallest indignation or dislike towards the offenders. The present vicious constitution of society alone is responsible for all these enormities; the poor sinners are but the helpless victims or instruments of its disorders, and could not possibly have avoided the errors into which they have been betrayed. Though they can bear with crimes, therefore, they cannot reconcile themselves to punishments; and have an unconquerable antipathy to prisons, gibbets, and houses of correction, as engines of oppression, and instruments of atrocious injustice. While the plea of moral necessity is thus artfully brought forward to convert all the excesses

of the poor into innocent misfortunes, no sort of indulgence is shown to the offences of the powerful and rich. Their oppressions, and seductions, and debaucheries, are the theme of many an angry verse; and the indignation and abhorrence of the reader is relentlessly conjured up against those perturbators of society, and scourges of mankind.

It is not easy to say, whether the fundamental absurdity of this doctrine, or the partiality of its application, be entitled to the severest reprehension. If men are driven to commit crimes, through a certain moral necessity; other men are compelled, by a similar necessity, to hate and despise them for their commission. The indignation of the sufferer is at least as natural as the guilt of him who makes him suffer; and the good order of society would probably be as well preserved, if our sympathies were sometimes called forth in behalf of the former. At all events, the same apology ought certainly to be admitted for the wealthy, as for the needy offender. They are subject alike to the overruling influence of necessity, and equally affected by the miserable condition of society. If it be natural for a poor man to murder and rob, in order to make himself comfortable, it is no less natural for a rich man to gormandise and domineer, in order to have the full use of his riches. Wealth is just as valid an excuse for the one class of vices as indigence is for the other. There are many other peculiarities of false sentiment in the productions of this class of writers, that are sufficiently deserving of commemoration. But we have already exceeded our limits in giving these general indications of their character, and must now hasten back to the consideration of the singular performance which has given occasion to all this discussion.

EXAMINATION OF MISS JOANNA BAILLIE'S PLAN OF HER PLAYS ON THE PASSIONS. No. I.*

These plays require a double criticism; first, as to the merit of the peculiar plan upon which they are composed; and, secondly, as to their own intrinsic excellence.

To such peculiar plans, in general, we confess that we are far from being partial: they necessarily exclude many beauties, and ensure nothing but constraint. The only plan of a dramatic writer should be to please and to interest as much as possible; but when, in addition to this, he resolves to write upon nothing but scriptural subjects, or to imitate the style of Shakspeare, or to have a siege, or the history of a passion, in every one of his pieces, he evidently cuts himself off from some of the means of success, puts fetters upon the freedom of his own genius, and multiplies the difficulties of a very arduous undertaking.

The writer of the pieces before us has espoused the patronage of what she has been pleased to call *characteristic truth*, the great charm of dramatic composition; and in order to magnify its importance, has degraded all the other requisites of a perfect drama to the rank of very weak and unprofitable auxiliaries. With a partiality not at all unusual in the advocates of a peculiar system, she admits, indeed, that a play may

* Miss Baillie's Plays on the Passions. — Vol. ii. p. 269. July, 1803.

have qualities that give nearly as much pleasure; but maintains, that this is altogether owing to the *folly* of mankind, and that if we were constituted as we ought to be, we should care very little for any thing but the just representation of character in our dramatic performances. This sentiment, we think, is pretty clearly expressed in the following passage of the "Introductory Discourse," prefixed to the former volume:—

"Our love of the grand, the beautiful, the novel, and, above all, of the marvellous, is very strong; and if we are richly fed with what we have a good relish for, we may be weaned to forget our native and favourite aliment; yet we can never so far forget it, but that we shall cling to, and acknowledge it again, whenever it is presented before us. In a work abounding with the marvellous and unnatural, if the author has any how stumbled upon an unsophisticated genuine stroke of nature, we shall immediately perceive and be delighted with it; though we are *foolish enough* at the same time to admire all the nonsense with which it is surrounded."

Now, we really cannot perceive why the admiration of novelty and grandeur should be considered as more foolish than the admiration of just sentiments, or consistent character. The same power that gave us a relish for the one, formed us to be delighted with the other; and the wisdom that guides us to the gratification of the first propensity, can scarcely condemn our indulgence in the second. Where the object is to give pleasure, nothing that pleases can be foolish; and a striking trait of character, or of nature, will only please the more, when it occurs in a performance which has already delighted us with its grandeur, its novelty, and its beauty. The skilful delineation of character is, no doubt, among the highest objects of the drama; but this has been so generally admitted, that it was the less necessary to undervalue all the rest. The true object of the drama is to interest and delight; and this it can frequently accomplish by incident as effectually as by character. There are innumerable *situations* that excite our sympathy in the strongest degree, though the characters of those who are placed in them be left almost entirely to be filled up from our general conceptions of human nature. Mothers bereaved of their children; lovers separated or restored to each other; the young and valiant cut off by untimely deaths; tyrants precipitated from their thrones; and many other occurrences or representations, are capable of awakening the highest interest, and the most anxious curiosity, although the character should be drawn only with those vague and undistinguishing features that fancy has associated with the situation.

But, even if we could agree with Miss Baillie, that the striking delineation of character was the cardinal excellence of the drama, we should find great difficulty in admitting that her plan was the most likely to ensure its attainment. The peculiarity of that plan consists in limiting the interest of the piece, in a great degree, to the developement of some one great passion in the principal character, and in exhibiting this passion in all the successive stages of its progress, from its origin to its final catastrophe. It does not appear to us that either of these observances is well calculated to increase the effect of any dramatic production.

If any thing more is meant by limiting the interest of the piece to the consequences of a single passion, than is implied in the vulgar rules for preserving unity of character and of action, we are inclined to think that something more is meant than can very easily be justified. The old maxims evidently require the predominancy of certain motives in the minds of the leading characters, and a certain consistency in the sympathies

that are excited by their fortunes. To carry these restrictions still farther, and to confine the whole interest of the story to the developement of a single passion, seems to us to be altogether impracticable, and could not even be attempted, in a very imperfect degree, without violating that unity of action, by which the general effect of the piece would be very materially impaired. To confine the attention, and tie down the sympathies, to the observance of one master passion through a whole play, is plainly impossible; first, because that passion, in order to prove its strength, must have some other passion to encounter and overcome in the bosom where it is at last to reign; and, secondly, because a certain portion of our sympathy must necessarily be reserved for the fate and the feelings of those who are the objects and the victims of this ruling passion in the hero. The first partition of our sympathy is altogether unavoidable; and Miss Baillie herself has accordingly been forced to submit to it. *Count Basil* is distracted between love and a passion for military glory; and the interest and sympathy excited by the whole story may be referred to the one passion just as properly as to the other. *De Montfort* is represented as struggling between a high sense of honour and a frantic and disgraceful antipathy; nor could the latter have been made interesting in any degree, unless our sympathy had first been very powerfully engaged for the former. *Ethwald*, in like manner, is agitated by ambition, and gratitude, and personal attachment; and pleases us as much by his generosity and kind affections, as he terrifies us by the consequences of his thirst for power. The second division of inerest that is claimed by those who inspire or oppose the domineering passion of the chief personage, is scarcely less necessary. We cannot easily sympathise with a lover, unless we take some concern in the object of his attachment; and are seldom much offended by the oppressions of a tyrant, when we do not enter very warmly into the feelings of those whom he oppresses. The only way in which the interest we take in the story can be in any degree engrossed by the hero, is to provide him with a succession of inferior patients and observers, through whom he moves in the grand career of his passion, and who are successively forgotten for the sake of those who replace them. By this contrivance, which is but seldom practicable, it is very obvious, however, that the interest of the piece is impaired and dissipated, and the unity of the action entirely broken. Miss Baillie has had recourse to it in the tragedy that occupies so large a portion of the present volume; and every reader of Ethwald must acknowledge, that the interest of the play is exceedingly diminished by the constant introduction and renewal of the inferior characters; and that the catastrophe, which is accomplished by persons with whom we have scarcely any previous acquaintance, is but ill calculated to produce any strong or satisfactory impression.

The peculiarity of Miss Baillie's plan, however, does not consist so much in reducing any play to the exhibition of a single passion, as in attempting to comprehend within it a complete view of the origin, growth, and consummation of this passion, under all its aspects of progress and maturity. This plan seems to us almost as unpoetical as that of the bard who began the tale of the Trojan war from the egg of Leda; and really does not appear very well calculated for a species of composition, in which the time of the action represented has usually been more circumscribed than in any other. Miss Baillie, however, is of opinion, that it will turn out to be a very valuable discovery; and insists much upon the advantage that will be gained by adhering to it, both in the developement of character, the increase of interest, and the promotion of moral improve-

ment. We are afraid that these expectations are more sanguine than reasonable.

To delineate a man's character, by tracing the progress of his ruling passion, is like describing his person by the yearly admeasurement of his foot, or rather by a termly report of the increase of a wen, by which his health and his beauty are ultimately destroyed. A ruling passion distorts and deforms the character; and its growth, instead of developing that character more fully, constantly withdraws more and more of it from our view. The growth of the passion is not the growth of the mind; and its progress and symptoms are pretty conform, in whatever subject it may have originated. *Amor omnibus idem*, at least so says the poet; and it may fairly be admitted, that men become assimilated, by their common subjection to some master-passion, who had previously been distinguished by very opposite characters. To delineate character, therefore, by the progress of such a passion, is like following a cloud of smoke, in order to discriminate more clearly the objects that it envelopes.

These considerations are so very obvious, that though Miss Baillie has certainly talked a great deal about tracing a passion from its origin, we are persuaded that she really did not expect much assistance from this maxim in the delineation of character. She has built, in general, upon a truer ground; and seems to have perceived very clearly the method of employing a predominating passion, so as to give brilliancy and effect to characteristic representation. This method, which, however, is by no means new, consists principally in the occasional introduction of the passion, or peculiar turn of mind, in transactions of inferior moment, and in circumstances where it does not serve at all to help forward the action of the piece. By this apparently accidental disclosure of consistency, a stamp of nature and reality is given to the whole delineation; and the glimpses that are thus caught of the hero, in the course of his ordinary deportment, serve, in a manner, to confirm those impressions that had been excited by his more studied and imposing appearances. In private life, and on trifling occasions, the splendid drapery of the passions is usually laid aside; and if we are permitted to look in upon them in this situation, we fancy that we recognise their genuine features with less uncertainty. If care be taken, therefore, to relieve the glare and pomp of the main action, by the insertion of a few such casual incidents, we seem to be let into the interior of the character, and attain a certain familiarity with the chief personages, that renders our conception of their whole character much more lively, entire, and impressive. It is upon this principle that the effect of most of the fine strokes of nature and character which occur in the writings of the poets, will be found to depend; and it is a principle, that has been quite familiar to criticism, ever since it was illustrated by the ancient commentators of Homer.

But though Miss Baillie has not overlooked this powerful instrument for the developement of characteristic effect, there is another, of still greater importance, which appears to be, in a good measure, excluded by her doctrine of the unity of passion. The art to which we now allude is that by which an appearance of individual reality is communicated to an ideal personage, and the functions of a dramatic hero assigned to a living being, with the whole of whose capacities and dispositions we are made to feel that we are acquainted. This poetical deception, however, can never be accomplished by the display of a single passion; and cannot even take place, we should imagine, where such a display is made the chief object of our attention. It is to be effected, indeed, only by an occasional neg-

lect and intermission of the principal action, and of the passions by which that action is forwarded; by the introduction of arbitrary and inconsiderable occurrences, and slight and transient indications of habits, sentiments, and feelings, that could not have been inferred from the conduct or emotions of the chief characters in the greater incidents of the piece. It is by these, and by these alone, that a definite object can be created for our sympathies to attach upon, and the true image of a living man be presented to our imagination. There is no man alive, of whose whole character we could judge merely from his conduct or expressions in some important transaction; and our sympathies are always but feebly excited for those with whose internal feelings we are so imperfectly acquainted. It is not enough, therefore, that the qualities bestowed upon our heroes be suitable to the conduct which is assigned them, or consistent with each other. A naked combination of the qualities necessary to account for the action, will never make up the idea of a real and entire man. There must be a delineation of those, also, that are of no use at the moment, and are not necessarily implied by the presence of the leading features. Without these, an action indeed may be represented; but the actors will be utterly unknown, and all impression of reality, along with every emotion of individual sympathy, will be utterly excluded. A play which discriminates its characters only by the great and leading passions that are essential to the parts they have to sustain, must be as deficient in interest and effect, therefore, as a picture which shows no more of the figures than is necessary to explain its subject; that displays the hand of the murderer, and the bleeding bosom of his victim, but omits all representation of the countenance and gestures of either, or of those circumstances in the surrounding scenery which may suggest aggravations or apologies for the crime. By the plan of Miss Baillie, however, these subordinate and arbitrary traits of character appear to be in a great measure excluded. Her heroes are to be mere personifications of single passions; and the growth and varied condition of one grand feature is to be incessantly held out to our observation, while an impenetrable shade is to be spread upon all the rest of the physiognomy. Among the debasements of modern tragedy, against which Miss Baillie declaims with so much animation, there is none, perhaps, so material as this, which her doctrine has so evident a tendency to sanction; nor is there any thing by which the writings of Shakspeare, and Beaumont and Fletcher, are so remarkably distinguished from those of the later dramatists, as by the individual truth and completeness of their representations of character. They are all drawn with the full lineaments and just proportions of real men; and, while the qualities by which their conduct is to be determined are marked with sufficient boldness and vivacity, the subordinate attributes are not forgotten, by which we recognise them to be creatures like ourselves, and are enabled to attach our feelings upon some definite and tangible object.

As to the *moral* effect of the drama, conducted upon this or upon any other plan, we confess that we are disposed to be very sceptical. Those plays are the best, we believe, that have done the least harm. The display of great passions is apt to excite an admiration which is not always extinguished by a fictitious view of their tragical effects; and the exhibition of interesting occurrences sometimes begets a disgust and contempt for the insipidity of ordinary life. There is something of cant, however, in this also. Plays have for the most part no moral effect at all: they are seen or read for amusement and curiosity only; and the study of them

forms so small a part of the occupation of any individual, that it is really altogether fantastical to ascribe to them any sensible effect in the formation of his character.

But even if the case were otherwise, and we were to believe all the pretty things that have been delivered by our essayists as to the moral effects of the stage, we really do not perceive that Miss Baillie's plan of composition is at all likely to forward that great and salutary object. It is her persuasion, it seems, that "looking back to the first rise, and tracing the progress of passion, points out to us those stages, in the approach of the enemy, where he might have been combated most successfully, and where the suffering him to pass may be considered as occasioning all the misery that ensues." Now, though this observation sounds tolerably well when taken in the abstract, it unfortunately fails altogether in the application. The greater part of the passions that are made use of in the drama are laudable in themselves, and only become vicious in their excess; while, at the same time, their progress is so gradual that it is frequently almost impossible to say where they ought to have been arrested. To look back to the first rise of such a passion, therefore, will be of no use to us in any case; since it is not till long after that period that it can become an object of jealousy or alarm; and since the occasions and stages of its increase are so complicated and multiplied, that it must often be impracticable to settle where the vicious series begins. The passion itself, too, may often be confirmed, before it indicates any tendency to evil; and the warning of the drama must either come too late, or lead us to repress some of the noblest and most generous propensities of our nature. The love of Count Basil, for instance, for an accomplished and virtuous princess, has nothing in it that should lead the readers of that tragedy to stifle such an honourable and successful passion in their own bosoms, or to shut the avenues of their hearts to the approaches of beauty and merit. Ethwald's impatience of obscurity, and his thirst for honourable distinction, in like manner, is a feeling which no moralist would wish to eradicate from a powerful or aspiring mind. In all such cases the shades by which a passion graduates into criminality are so fine, and the temptations and apologies by which its seductions are made effectual, so variously and nicely adapted to the circumstances of the imaginary character, that it is impossible to suppose, for a moment, that any one can be taught to guard against them by the peculiar incidents of one dramatic representation. Every one knows, that violent passions are apt to hurry men into crimes and improprieties; and this vulgar lesson, which surely stands in no need of illustration, can scarcely be brought more home to our feelings by a drama, which can never accommodate its fable to the particular character and situations of individuals.

If there be any passions to which Miss Baillie's dramatic warnings can be applicable, they can only be those, therefore, that are intrinsically and fundamentally vicious, and against the remotest approaches of which we ought to be continually on our guard. Hatred, jealousy, envy, and some others, are in this class; and it may be conceived, that to trace these to their origin may contribute to the preservation of our morality, by enabling us to detect them in their rudiments, and to resist them in their infancy. It has happened, however, that Miss B., by a very singular infelicity in the execution of her plan, has been at the trouble to trace the origin and progress of love and ambition with great care and exactness, while she has only given us a view of hatred in its matured and confirmed state. She has taught us, in this way, how to distinguish and resist the

first symptons of those passions which, in the beginning, are neither criminal nor dangerous; and has left us altogether without any instructions for combating or discovering those other passions that are never for a moment either innocent or satisfactory, and against the first dawnings of which our conscientious vigilance should have been directed. Basil and Ethwald are made to run their whole career of love and ambition before us, while it is almost impossible to say at what period their passions become criminal; while De Montfort presents himself, in the very first scene, the victim of a confirmed and inveterate hatred. If Miss B. really believed that her readers would be better able to resist the influence of bad passions by studying their natural history and early symptoms in her plays, she ought certainly to have traced this of hatred to its origin more carefully than any other, since there is none of which it would be so desirable to cut off the shoots, or extirpate the seeds, at the beginning.

Though it be almost time to conclude these general remarks upon the plan announced in the titlepage of this volume, yet we cannot leave the subject without making one remark upon the spontaneous addition that is made to its difficulties, by the extraordinary resolution of making every separate passion the subject of a tragedy and a comedy. Passion, perhaps, is not essential to comedy at all; but the distribution of passion into tragical and comical, is so old, so obvious, and so natural, that we really are at a loss to conceive what strange caprice could have tempted this ingenious writer into so wanton a violation of it. A comedy upon Hatred sounds as paradoxical to our ears as an elegy on a wedding, and implies as great a violation of all our customary associations. The constraint that must be submitted to, in order to make out this fantastic piece of uniformity, would deserve our most cordial compassion, if it were not assumed with a certain voluntary perversity: it would not be half so absurd in a manager to insist that all his performers should appear every night both in a tragic and a comic character.

Upon the whole, then, we are pretty decidedly of opinion, that Miss Baillie's plan of composing separate plays upon the passions, is, in so far as it is at all new or original, in all respects extremely injudicious; and we have been induced to express this opinion more fully and strongly, from the anxiety that we feel to deliver her pleasing and powerful genius from the trammels that have been imposed upon it by this unfortunate system. It is paying no great compliment, perhaps, to her talents, to say that they are superior to those of any of her contemporaries among the English writers of tragedy; and that, with proper management, they bid fair to produce something that posterity will not allow to be forgotten. Without perplexing herself with the observances of an arbitrary system, she will find that all tragical subjects imply the agency of the greater passions; and that she will have occasion for all her skill in the delineation of character, and all her knowledge of the human heart, although she should only aim (as Shakspeare and Otway have done before her) at the excitation of virtuous sympathy, and the production of a high pathetic effect. Her readers, and her critics, will then discover those moral lessons, which she is now a little too eager to obtrude upon their notice; and will admire, more freely, the productions of a genius that seems less encumbered with its task, and less conscious of its exertions.

ON THE SUBJECTS OF CRABBE'S POETRY.*

Mr. Crabbe is distinguished from all other poets, both by the choice of his subjects, and by his manner of treating them. All his persons are taken from the lower ranks of life; and all his scenery from the most ordinary and familiar objects of nature or art. His characters and incidents, too, are as common as the elements out of which they are compounded are humble; and not only has he nothing prodigious or astonishing in any of his representations, but he has not even attempted to impart any of the ordinary colours of poetry to those vulgar materials. He has no moralising swains or sentimental tradesmen; and scarcely ever seeks to charm us by the artless manners or lowly virtues of his personages. On the contrary, he has represented his villagers and humble burghers as altogether as dissipated, and more dishonest and discontented, than the profligates of higher life; and, instead of conducting us through blooming groves and pastoral meadows, has led us along filthy lanes and crowded wharfs, to hospitals, alms-houses, and gin-shops. In some of these delineations, he may be considered as the satirist of low life, — an occupation sufficiently arduous, and in a great degree new and original in our language. But by far the greater part of his poetry is of a different and a higher character; and aims at moving or delighting us by lively, touching, and finely contrasted representations of the dispositions, sufferings, and occupations of those ordinary persons who form the far greater part of our fellow-creatures. This, too, he has sought to effect, merely by placing before us the clearest, most brief, and most striking sketches of their external condition, — the most sagacious and unexpected strokes of character, — and the truest and most pathetic pictures of natural feeling and common suffering. By the mere force of his art, and the novelty of his style, he forces us to attend to objects that are usually neglected, and to enter into feelings from which we are in general but too eager to escape; — and then trusts to nature for the effect of the representation.

It is obvious, at first sight, that this is not a task for an ordinary hand; and that many ingenious writers, who make a very good figure with battles, nymphs, and moonlight landscapes, would find themselves quite helpless if set down among streets, harbours, and taverns. The difficulty of such subjects, in short, is sufficiently visible — and some of the causes of that difficulty: but they have their advantages also; — and of these, and their hazards, it seems natural to say a few words, before entering more minutely into the merits of the work before us.

The first great advantage of such familiar subjects is, that every one is necessarily perfectly well acquainted with the originals; and is therefore sure to feel all that pleasure, from a faithful representation of them, which results from the perception of a perfect and successful imitation. In the kindred art of painting, we find that this single consideration has been sufficient to stamp a very high value upon accurate and lively delineations of objects, in themselves the most uninteresting, and even disagreeable; and no very inconsiderable part of the pleasure which may be derived from Mr. Crabbe's poetry may be referred to its mere truth and fidelity, and to the brevity and clearness with which he sets before his readers objects and characters with which they have been all their days familiar.

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* The Borough, a Poem.—Vol. xvi. p. 30. April, 1810.

In his happier passages, however, he has a higher merit, and imparts a far higher gratification. The chief delight of poetry consists not so much in what it directly supplies to the imagination, as in what it enables it to supply to itself; — not in warming the heart with its passing brightness, but in kindling its own lasting stores of light and heat; — not in hurrying the fancy along by a foreign and accidental impulse, but in setting it agoing, by touching its internal springs and principles of activity. Now, this highest and most delightful effect can only be produced by the poet's striking a note to which the heart and the affections naturally vibrate in unison; — by his rousing one of a large family of kindred impressions; — by his dropping the rich seed of his fancy upon the fertile and sheltered places of the imagination. But it is evident, that the emotions connected with common and familiar objects, — with objects which fill every man's memory, and are necessarily associated with all that he has felt or fancied, are of all others the most likely to answer this description, and to produce, where they can be raised to a sufficient height, this great effect in its utmost perfection. It is for this reason that the images and affections that belong to our *universal* nature are always, if tolerably represented, infinitely more captivating, in spite of their apparent commonness and simplicity, than those that are peculiar to certain situations, however they may come recommended by novelty or grandeur. The familiar feeling of maternal tenderness and anxiety, which is every day before our eyes, even in the brute creation, — and the enchantment of youthful love, which is nearly the same in all characters, ranks, and situations, — still contribute more to the beauty and interest of poetry than all the misfortunes of princes, the jealousies of heroes, and the feats of giants, magicians, or ladies in armour. Every one can enter into the former set of feelings; and but a few into the latter. The one calls up a thousand familiar and long-remembered emotions, — and are answered and reflected on every side by the kindred impressions which experience or observation have traced upon every memory; while the other lights up but a transient and unfruitful blaze, and passes away without perpetuating itself in any corresponding sensation.

Now, the delineation of all that concerns the lower and most numerous classes of society is, in this respect, on a footing with the pictures of our primary affections, — that their originals are necessarily familiar to all men, and are inseparably associated with a multitude of their most interesting impressions. Whatever may be our own condition, we all live surrounded with the poor, from infancy to age; — we hear daily of their sufferings and misfortunes; and their toils, their crimes, or their pastimes, are our hourly spectacle. Many diligent readers of poetry know little, by their own experience, of palaces, castles, or camps; and still less of princes, warriors, and banditti; — but every one thoroughly understands every thing about cottages, streets, and villages; and conceives, pretty correctly, the character and condition of sailors, ploughmen, and artificers. If the poet can contrive, therefore, to create a sufficient interest in subjects like these, they will infallibly sink deeper into the mind, and be more prolific of kindred trains of emotion, than subjects of greater dignity. Nor is the difficulty of exciting such an interest by any means so great as is generally imagined. It is human nature, and human feelings, after all, that form the true source of interest in poetry of every description; — and the splendour and the marvels by which it is sometimes surrounded, serve no other purpose than to fix our attention on those workings of the heart, and those energies of the understanding, which alone command all

the genuine sympathies of human beings, — and which may be found as abundantly in the breasts of cottagers as of kings. Wherever there are human beings, therefore, with feelings and characters to be represented, our attention may be fixed by the art of the poet,— by his judicious selection of circumstances, — by the force and vivacity of his style, and the clearness and brevity of his representations. In point of fact, we are all touched more deeply, as well as more frequently, in real life, with the sufferings of peasants than of princes; and sympathise much oftener, and more heartily, with the successes of the poor, than of the rich and distinguished. The occasions of such feelings are indeed so many, and so common, that they do not often leave any very permanent traces behind them, but pass away, and are effaced by the very rapidity of their succession. The business and the cares and the pride of the world obstruct the developement of the emotions to which they would naturally give rise, and press so close and thick upon the mind, as to shut it, at most seasons, against the reflections that are perpetually seeking for admission. When we have leisure, however, to look quietly into our hearts, we shall find in them an infinite multitude of little fragments of sympathy with our brethren in humble life, — abortive movements of compassion, and embryos of kindness and concern, which had once fairly begun to live and germinate within them, though withered and broken off by the selfish bustle and fever of our daily occupations. Now, all these may be revived and carried on to maturity by the art of the poet; — and, therefore, a powerful effort to interest us in the feelings of the humble and obscure, will usually call forth more deep, more numerous, and more permanent emotions, than can ever be excited by the fate of princesses and heroes. Independent of the circumstances to which we have already alluded, there are causes which make us at all times more ready to enter into the feelings of the humble than of the exalted part of our species. Our sympathy with their enjoyments is enhanced by a certain mixture of pity for their general condition, which, by purifying it from that taint of envy which almost always adheres to our admiration of the great, renders it more welcome and satisfactory to our bosoms; while our concern for their sufferings is at once softened and endeared to us by the recollection of our own exemption from them, and by the feeling, that we frequently have it in our power to relieve them.

From these, and from other causes, it appears to us to be certain, that where subjects taken from humble life can be made sufficiently interesting to overcome the distaste and the prejudices with which the usages of polished society too generally lead us to regard them, the interest which they excite will commonly be more profound and more lasting than any that can be raised upon loftier themes; and the poet of the Village and the Borough be oftener and longer read, than the poet of the Court or the Camp. The most popular passages of Shakspeare and Cowper, we think, are of this description; and there is much, both in the volume before us, and in Mr. Crabbe's former publications, to which we might now venture to refer, as proofs of the same doctrine. When such representations have once made an impression on the imagination, they are remembered daily, and for ever. We can neither look around nor within us, without being reminded of their truth and their importance; and, while the more brilliant effusions of romantic fancy are recalled only at long intervals, and in rare situations, we feel that we cannot walk a step from our own doors, nor cast a glance back on our departed years, without being indebted to the poet of vulgar life for some striking image or touching reflection, of which the

occasions were always before us, but — till he taught us how to improve them — were almost always allowed to escape.

Such, we conceive, are some of the advantages of the subjects which Mr. Crabbe has in a great measure introduced into modern poetry; — and such the grounds upon which we venture to predict the durability of the reputation which he has acquired. That they have their disadvantages also, is obvious; and it is no less obvious, that it is to these we must ascribe the greater part of the faults and deformities with which this author is fairly chargeable. The two great errors into which he has fallen, are — that he has described many things not worth describing; — and that he has frequently excited disgust, instead of pity or indignation, in the breasts of his readers. These faults are obvious, — and, we believe, are popularly laid to his charge: yet there is, in so far as we have observed, a degree of misconception as to the true grounds and limits of the charge, which we think it worth while to take this opportunity of correcting.

The poet of humble life *must* describe a great deal, — and must even describe minutely many things which possess in themselves no beauty or grandeur. The reader's fancy must be awakened, — and the power of his own pencil displayed: — a distinct locality and imaginary reality must be given to his characters and agents, and the ground colour of their common condition must be laid in, before his peculiar and selected groups can be presented with any effect or advantage. In the same way, he must study characters with a minute and anatomical precision; and must make both himself and his readers familiar with the ordinary traits and general family features of the beings among whom they are to move, before they can either understand or take much interest in the individuals who are to engross their attention. Thus far, there is no excess or unnecessary minuteness. But this faculty of observation, and this power of description, hold out great temptations to go farther. There is a pride and a delight in the exercise of all peculiar power; and the poet, who has learned to describe external objects exquisitely with a view to heighten the effect of his moral designs, and to draw characters with accuracy to help forward the interest or the pathos of the picture, will be in great danger of describing scenes, and drawing characters, for no other purpose but to indulge his taste, and to display his talents. It cannot be denied, we think, that Mr. Crabbe has on many occasions proved unequal to this temptation. He is led away, every now and then, by his lively conception of external objects, and by his nice and sagacious observation of human character; and wantons and luxuriates in descriptions and moral portrait-painting, while his readers are left to wonder to what end so much industry has been exerted.

His chief fault, however, is his frequent lapse into disgusting representations; and this, we will confess, is an error for which we find it far more difficult either to account or to apologise. We are not, however, of the opinion which we have often heard stated, that he has represented human nature under too unfavourable an aspect, or that the distaste which his poetry sometimes produces, is owing merely to the painful nature of the scenes and subjects with which it abounds. On the contrary, we think he has given a juster, as well as a more striking picture, of the true character and situation of the lower orders of this country, than any other writer, whether in verse or in prose; and that he has made no more use of painful emotions than was necessary to the production of a pathetic effect.

All powerful and pathetic poetry, it is obvious, abounds in images of

distress. The delight which it bestows partakes strongly of pain; and, by a sort of contradiction which has long engaged the attention of the reflecting, the compositions that attract us most powerfully, and detain us the longest, are those that produce in us most of the effects of actual suffering and wretchedness. The solution of this paradox is to be found, we think, in the simple fact, that pain is a far stronger sensation than pleasure in human existence; and that the cardinal virtue of all things that are intended to delight the mind, is to produce a strong sensation. Life itself appears to consist in sensation; and the universal passion of all beings that have life seems to be, that they should be made intensely conscious of it, by a succession of powerful and engrossing emotions. All the mere gratifications or natural pleasures that are in the power even of the most fortunate, are quite insufficient to fill this vast craving for sensation; and a more violent stimulus is sought for by those who have attained the vulgar heights of life, in the pains and dangers of war, — the agonies of gaming, — or the feverish toils of ambition. To those who have tasted of these potent cups, where the bitter however so obviously predominates, the security, the comforts, and what are called the enjoyments of common life, are intolerably insipid and disgusting. Nay, we think we have observed, that even those who without any effort or exertion have experienced unusual misery, frequently appear, in like manner, to acquire a taste for it, and come to look on the tranquillity of ordinary life with a kind of indifference not unmingled with contempt. It is certain, at least, that they dwell with most apparent satisfaction on the memory of those days which have been marked by the deepest and most agonising sorrows, and derive a certain delight from the recollections of those overwhelming sensations which once occasioned so fierce a throb in the languishing pulse of their existence.

If any thing of this kind, however, can be traced in real life, — if the passion for emotion be so strong, as to carry us, not in imagination, but in reality, over the rough edge of present pain, — it will not be difficult to explain why it should be so attractive in the copies and fictions of poetry. There, as in real life, the great demand is for emotion; while the pain with which it may be attended, can scarcely, by any possibility, exceed the limits of endurance. The recollection, that it is but a copy and a fiction, is quite sufficient to keep it down to a moderate temperature, and to make it welcome as the sign or the harbinger of that agitation of which the soul is avaricious. It is not, then, from any peculiar quality in painful emotions that they become capable of affording the delight which attends them in tragic or pathetic poetry, — but merely from the circumstance of their being more intense and powerful than any other emotions of which the mind is susceptible. If it was the constitution of our nature to feel joy as keenly, or to sympathise with it as heartily as we do with sorrow, we have no doubt that no other sensation would ever be intentionally excited by the artists that minister to delight. But the fact is, that the pleasures of which we are capable are slight and feeble, compared with the pains that we may endure; and that, feeble as they are, the sympathy which they excite falls much more short of the original emotion. When the object, therefore, is to obtain sensation, there can be no doubt to which of the fountains we shall repair; and if there be but few pains in real life which are not, in some measure, endeared to us by the emotions with which they are attended, we may be pretty sure, that the more distress we introduce into poetry, the more we shall rivet the attention and attract the admiration of the reader.

There is but one exception to this rule, — and it brings us back from the apology of Mr. Crabbe, to his condemnation. Every form of distress, whether it proceed from passion or from fortune, and whether it fall upon vice or virtue, adds to the interest and the charm of poetry — except only that which is connected with ideas of *disgust*, — the least taint of which disenchants the whole scene, and puts an end both to delight and sympathy. But what is it, it may be asked, that is the proper object of disgust? and what is the precise description of things which we think Mr. Crabbe so inexcusable for admitting? It is not easy to define a term at once so simple and so significant; but it may not be without its use to indicate, in a general way, our conception of its force and comprehension.

It is needless, we suppose, to explain what are the objects of disgust in physical or external existences. These are sufficiently plain and unequivocal; and it is universally admitted, that all mention of them must be carefully excluded from every poetical description. With regard, again, to human character, action, and feeling, we should be inclined to term every thing disgusting, which represented misery, without making any appeal to our love or our admiration. If the suffering person be amiable, the delightful feeling of love and affection tempers the pain which the contemplation of suffering has a tendency to excite, and enhances it into the stronger, and therefore more attractive, sensation of pity. If there be great power or energy, however, united to guilt or wretchedness, the mixture of admiration exalts the emotion into something that is sublime and pleasing. Even in cases of mean and atrocious guilt, our sympathy with the victims upon whom it is practised, and our active indignation and desire of vengeance, reconcile us to the humiliating display, and make a compound that, upon the whole, is productive of pleasure.

The only sufferers, then, upon whom we cannot bear to look, are those that excite pain by their wretchedness, while they are too depraved to be the objects of affection, and too weak and insignificant to be the causes of misery to others, or, consequently, of indignation to the spectators. Such are the depraved, abject, diseased, and neglected poor, — creatures in whom every thing amiable or respectable has been extinguished by sordid passions or brutal debauchery, — who have no means of doing the mischief of which they are capable, — whom every one despises, and no one can either love or fear. On the characters, the miseries, and the vices of such beings, we look with *disgust* merely: and, though it may perhaps serve some *moral* purpose, occasionally to set before us this humiliating spectacle of human nature sunk to utter worthlessness and insignificance, it is altogether in vain to think of exciting either pity or horror by the truest and most forcible representations of their sufferings or of their enormities. They have no hold upon any of the feelings that lead us to take an interest in our fellow-creatures; — we turn away from them, therefore, with loathing and dispassionate aversion; — we feel our imaginations polluted by the intrusion of any images connected with them; and are offended and disgusted when we are forced to look closely upon those festering heaps of moral filth and corruption. It is with concern we add, that we know no writer who has sinned so deeply in this respect as Mr. Crabbe, — who has so often presented us with spectacles which it is purely painful and degrading to contemplate, and bestowed such powers of conception and expression in giving us distinct ideas of what we must abhor to remember. If Mr. Crabbe had been a person of ordinary talents, we might have accounted for his error, in some degree, by supposing that

his frequent success in treating of subjects which had been usually rejected by other poets, had at length led him to disregard altogether the common impressions of mankind as to what was allowable and what inadmissible in poetry, and to reckon the unalterable laws by which nature has regulated our sympathies, among the prejudices by which they were shackled and impaired. It is difficult, however, to conceive how a writer of his quick and exact observation should have failed to perceive, that there is not a single instance of a serious interest being excited by an object of disgust; and that Shakspeare himself, who has ventured every thing, has never ventured to shock our feelings with the crimes or the sufferings of beings absolutely without power or principle. Independent of universal practice, too, it is still more difficult to conceive how he should have overlooked the reason on which this practice is founded; for though it be generally true, that poetical representations of suffering and of guilt produce emotion, and consequently delight, yet it certainly did not require the penetration of Mr. Crabbe to discover, that there is a degree of depravity which counteracts our sympathy with suffering, and a degree of insignificance which extinguishes our interest in guilt. *

PARALLEL BETWEEN ROUSSEAU AND LORD BYRON.

SCEPTICISM OF BYRON'S POETRY. — STRICTURES ON THE FOURTH CANTO OF CHILDE HAROLD. †

THERE are two writers, in modern literature, whose extraordinary power over the minds of men, it may be truly said, has existed less in their works than in themselves, — Rousseau and Lord Byron. They have other points of resemblance. Both are distinguished by the most ardent and vivid delineations of intense conception, and by an intense sensibility of passion, rather than of affection. Both, too, by this double power, have held a dominion over the sympathy of their readers, far beyond the range of those ordinary feelings which are usually excited by the mere efforts of genius. The impression of this interest still accompanies the perusal of their writings: but there is another interest of more lasting, and far stronger power, which the one has possessed, and the other now possesses, — which lies in the continual embodying of the individual character, it might almost be said, of the very person, of the writer. When we speak or think of Rousseau or Byron, we are not conscious of speaking or thinking of an author. We have a vague but impassioned remembrance of men of surpassing genius, eloquence, and power, — of prodigious capacity both of misery and happiness. We feel as if we had transiently

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* There is an exceedingly able essay on the character of Crabbe's poetry in vol. iv. p. 282. of the Quarterly Review. The poetical criticisms in that journal are, with a few exceptions, written with a praiseworthy impartiality; and not a few may fairly compete, in point of style and a profound knowledge of the subject, with some of the most brilliant dissertations of its distinguished rival.

† Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto IV. By Lord Byron. — Vol. xxx. p. 87. June, 1818.

met such beings in real life, or had known them in the dim and dark communion of a dream. Each of their works presents, in succession, a fresh idea of themselves; and, while the productions of other great men stand out from them, like something they have created; theirs, on the contrary, are images, pictures, busts of their living selves, — clothed, no doubt, at different times in different drapery, and prominent from a different background, — but uniformly impressed with the same form, and mien, and lineaments, and not to be mistaken for the representations of any other of the children of men.

But this view of the subject, though universally felt to be a true one, requires perhaps a little explanation. The personal character of which we have spoken, it should be understood, is not, altogether, that on which the seal of life has been set, — and to which, therefore, moral approval or condemnation is necessarily annexed, as to the language or conduct of actual existence. It is the character, so to speak, which is prior to conduct, and yet open to good and to ill, — the constitution of the being, in body and in soul. Each of those illustrious writers has, in this light, filled his works with expressions of his own character, — has unveiled to the world the secrets of his own being — the mysteries of the framing of man. They have gone down into those depths which every man may sound for himself, though not for another; and they have made disclosures to the world of what they beheld and knew there — disclosures that have commanded and enforced a profound and universal sympathy, by proving that all mankind, the troubled and the untroubled, the lofty and the low, the strongest and the frailest, are linked together by the bonds of a common but inscrutable nature.

Thus, each of these wayward and richly-gifted spirits has made himself the object of profound interest to the world, — and that, too, during periods of society when ample food was everywhere spread abroad for the meditations and passions of men. What love and desire, — what longing and passionate expectation hung upon the voice of Rousseau, the idol of his day! — That spell is broken. We now can regard his works in themselves, in great measure free from all the delusions and illusions that, like the glories of a bright and vapoury atmosphere, were for ever rising up and encircling the image of their wonderful creator. Still is the impression of his works vivid and strong. The charm which cannot pass away is there, — life breathing in dead words, — the pulses of passion, — the thrilling of the frame, — the sweet pleasure stealing from senses touched with ecstasy into sounds which the tongue frames, and the lips utter with delight. All these still are there, — the fresh beauty, the undimmed lustre — the immortal bloom and verdure and fragrance of life. These, light and vision-like as they seem, endure as in marble. But that which made the spirits of men, from one end of Europe to the other, turn to the name of Rousseau, — that idolising enthusiasm which we can now hardly conceive, was the illusion of one generation, and has not survived to another. And what was the spell of that illusion? Was it merely that bewitching strain of dreaming melancholy which lent to moral declamation the tenderness of romance; or that fiery impress of burning sensibility, which threw over abstract and subtle disquisitions all the colours of a lover's tale? These, undoubtedly — but not these alone. It was that continual impersonation of himself in his writings, by which he was for ever kept brightly present before the eyes of men. There was in him a strange and unsated desire of depicturing himself, throughout all the changes of his being. His wild temper only found ease in tracing out, in laying

bare to the universal gaze, the very groundwork, the most secret paths, the darkest coverts, of one of the most wayward and unimaginable minds ever framed by nature. From the moment that his first literary success had wedded him to the public, this was his history, — and such his strange, contradictory, divided life. Shy, and shunning the faces of men in his daily walks, yet searching and rending up the inmost recesses of his heart for the inspection of that race which he feared or hated. As a man, turning from the light, as from something unsupportably loathsome, and plunging into the thickest shades. Yet, in that other existence which he held from imagination, living only in the presence of men, — in the full broad glare of the world's eye, — and eagerly, impetuously, passionately, unsparingly seizing on all his own most hidden thoughts — his loneliest moods — his most sacred feelings — which had been cherished for the seclusion in which they sprung — for their own still deep peace — and for their breathings of unbeheld communions, — seizing upon all these, and flinging them out into the open air, that they might feed the curiosity of that eager, idle, frivolous world from which he had fled in misanthropical disgust — that he might array an exhibition to their greedy gaze, — and that he, the morbid and melancholy lover of solitude, might act a conspicuous and applauded part on the crowded theatre of public fame.

It might, on a hasty consideration, seem to us, that such undisguised revelation of feelings and passions, which the becoming pride of human nature, jealous of its own dignity, would, in general, desire to hold in unviolated silence, could produce in the public mind only pity, sorrow, or repugnance. But, in the case of men of real genius, like Rousseau or Byron, it is otherwise. Each of us must have been aware in himself of a singular illusion, by which these disclosures, when read with that tender or high interest which attaches to poetry, seem to have something of the nature of private and confidential communications. They are not felt, while we read, as declarations published to the world, — but almost as secrets whispered to chosen ears. Who is there that feels, for a moment, that the voice which reaches the inmost recesses of his heart is speaking to the careless multitudes around him? Or, if we do so remember, the words seem to pass by others like air, and to find their way to the hearts for whom they were intended, — kindred and sympathising spirits, who discern and own that secret language, of which the privacy is not violated, though spoken in hearing of the uninitiated, — because it is not understood. There is an unobserved beauty that smiles on us alone; and the more beautiful to us, because we feel as if chosen out from a crowd of lovers. Something analogous to this is felt in the grandest scenes of Nature and of Art. Let a hundred persons look from a hill-top over some transcendent landscape. Each will select from the wide-spread glory at his feet, for his more special love and delight, some different glimpse of sunshine, — or solemn grove, — or embowered spire, — or brown-mouldering ruin, — or castellated cloud. During their contemplation, the soul of each man is amidst its own creations, and in the heart of his own solitude; — nor is the depth of that solitude broken, though it lies open to the sunshine, and before the eyes of unnumbered spectators. It is the same in great and impressive scenes of art, — for example, in a theatre. The tenderest tones of acted tragedy reach our hearts with a feeling as if that inmost soul which they disclose revealed itself to us alone. The audience of a theatre forms a sublime unity to the actor; but each person sees and feels with the same incommunicated intensity,

as if all passed only before his own gifted sight. The publicity which is before our eyes is not acknowledged by our minds; and each heart feels itself to be the sole agitated witness of the pageant of misery.

But there are other reasons why we read with complacency writings which, by the most public declaration of most secret feelings, ought, it might seem, to shock and revolt our sympathy. A great poet may address the whole world in the language of intensest passion, concerning objects of which rather than speak, face to face, with any one human being on earth, he would perish in his misery; for it is in solitude that he utters what is to be wafted by all the winds of heaven. There are, during his inspiration, present with him only the shadows of men. He is not daunted, or perplexed, or disturbed, or repelled by real, living, breathing features. He can updraw just as much as he chooses of the curtain that hangs between his own solitude and the world of life. He thus pours his soul out, partly to himself alone,—partly to the ideal abstractions, and impersonated images, that float round him at his own conjuration,—and partly to human beings like himself, moving in the dark distance of the every-day world. He confesses himself, not before men, but before the Spirit of Humanity. And he thus fearlessly lays open his heart,—assured that nature never prompted unto genius that which will not triumphantly force its wide way into the human heart. We can thus easily imagine the poet whom, in real life, the countenances and voices of his fellow-men might silence into shame, or fastidiousness, or timidity, or aversion, or disdain,—yet kindling in his solitude into irrepressible passion and enthusiasm towards human nature and all its transitory concerns,—anxiously moulding himself into the object of men's most engrossing and vehement love or aversion,—identifying his own existence with all their strongest and profoundest passions,—claiming kindred with them, not in their virtues alone, but in their darkest vices and most fatal errors;—yet, in the midst of all this, proudly guarding his own prevailing character, so that it shall not merge in the waves of a common nature, but stand "in shape and gesture proudly eminent," contemplated with still-increasing interest by the millions that, in spite of themselves, feel and acknowledge its strange and unaccountable ascendency.

The reasons then are obvious, why a writer of very vivid sensibilities may, by impassioned self-delineation, hold a wondrous power over the entranced minds of his readers. But this power is in his living hands; and, like the wand of the magician, it loses its virtue on its master's death. We feel chiefly the influence of such a writer, while he lives—our contemporary—going with us a fellow-voyager on the stream of life, and from time to time flashing towards us the emanations of his spirit. Our love—our expectation follow the courses of his mind, and, if his life repel us not, the courses of his life. It was the strange madness of Rousseau to pour the blaze of his reputation over the scandals of his life. But this was later in his career; and his name for a long time in Europe was that of an hermit-sage—a martyr of liberty and virtue,—a persecuted good man loving a race unworthy of him, and suffering alike from their injustice and from the excess of his own spirit. He made a character for himself;—and whatever he had made it, it might have been believed. It was an assumed ideal impersonation of a character of literary and philosophical romance. At last, indeed, he broke up his own spell. But if he could have left the delusion behind him, he could not have left the power;—for the power hangs round the living man; it does not rest upon the grave.

When death removes such a writer from our sight, the magical influence of which we have spoken gradually fades away; and a new generation, free from all personal feelings towards the idol of a former age, may perhaps be wearied with that perpetual self-reference which to them seems merely the querulousness or the folly of unhappy or diseased egotism. It is even probable, that they may perversely withhold a portion of just admiration and delight from him who was once the undisputed sovereign of the soul, and that they may show their surprise at the subjection of their predecessors beneath the tyranical despotism of genius, by scorning themselves to bow before its power, or acknowledge its legitimacy. It is at least certain, that by the darkness of death such luminaries, if not eclipsed, are shorn of their beams. So much, even in their works of most general interest, derives its beauty and fascination from a vivid feeling, in the reader's mind, of its being a portraiture of one with whom he has formed a kind of strange, wild, and disturbed friendship, that they who come after, and have never felt the sorcery of the living man, instead of being kindled up by such pictures into impassioned wonder and delight, may gaze on them with no stronger emotion than curiosity, and even turn from them with indifference. Such must be more or less the fate of all works of genius, however splendid and powerful, of which the chief interest is not in universal truth, so much as in the intensity of individual feeling, and the impersonation of individual character.

It would, indeed, be in most violent contradiction to all we have formerly written of Lord Byron, were we to say that he stands in this predicament. Yet, there is a certain applicability of our observations even to him, as well as to Rousseau, with whom, perhaps too fancifully, we have now associated his nature and his name. Posterity may make fewer allowances for much in himself and his writings, than his contemporaries are willing to do; nor will they, with the same passionate and impetuous zeal, follow the wild voice that too often leads into a haunted wilderness of doubt and darkness. To them, as to us, there will always be something majestic in his misery—something sublime in his despair. But they will not, like us, be withheld from sterner and severer feelings, and from the more frequent visitings of moral condemnation, by that awful commiseration and sympathy which a great poet breathes at will into all hearts, from his living agonies,—nor, by that restless, and watchful, and longing anxiety, to see again and again the princely sufferer rising up with fresh confessions of a still more magnificent sorrow,—nor, by that succession of affecting appeals to the frailties and troubles of our own hearts, which now keeps him vividly, and brightly, in our rememberance, wherever his soul, tempest-like, may have driven him over earth and sea,—nor, above all, by the cheering and lofty hope now felt by them who wish to see genius the inseparable companion of virtue,—that he whose inspiration holds us always in wonder, and so often in delight, may come ere long to breathe a serener atmosphere of thought,—and, after all his wanderings, and all his woes,—with subsided passions, and invigorated intellect, calmly rest at last in the collected majesty of his power.

We are not now writing a formal critique on the genius of Byron, but rather expressing our notions of the relation in which he stands with the lovers of poetry. There is felt to be between him and the public mind, a stronger personal bond than ever linked its movements to any other living poet. And we think that this bond will in future be still more

closely riveted. During the composition of the first cantos of Childe Harold, he had but a confused idea of the character he wished to delineate,—nor did he perhaps very distinctly comprehend the scope and tendencies of his own genius. Two conceptions, distinct from each other, seem therein to be often blended,—one, of ideal human beings, made up of certain troubled powers and passions,—and one, of himself ranging the world of Nature and Man in wonder and delight and agitation, in his capacity of a poet. These conceptions, which frequently jostled and interfered with each other, he has since more distinctly unfolded in separate poems. His troubled imaginary beings,—possessing much of himself, and far more not of himself, he has made into Giaours, Conrads, Laras, and Alps,—and his conception of himself has been expanded into Childe Harold, as we now behold him on that splendid pilgrimage. It is not enough to say that the veil is at last thrown off. It is a nobler creature who is before us The ill-sustained misanthropy and disdain of the first two Cantos more faintly glimmer throughout the third, and may be said to disappear wholly from the fourth, which reflects the high and disturbed visions of earthly glory, as a dark swollen tide images the splendours of the sky in portentous colouring, and broken magnificence.

We have admitted, that much of himself is depicted in all his heroes; but when we seem to see the poet shadowed out in all those states of disordered being which such heroes exhibit, we are far from believing that his own mind has gone through those states of disorder, in its own experience of life. We merely conceive of it as having felt within itself the capacity of such disorders, and therefore exhibiting itself before us in possibility. This is not general—it is rare with great poets. Neither Homer, nor Shakspeare, nor Milton, ever show themselves in the characters which they portray. Their poetical personages have no reference to themselves; but are distinct, independent creatures of their minds, produced in the full freedom of intellectual power. In Byron, there does not seem this freedom of power. There is little appropriation of character to events. Character is first, and all in all. It is dictated—compelled by some force in his own mind necessitating him,—and the events obey. These poems, therefore, with all their beauty and vigour, are not, like Scott's poems, full and complete narrations of some one definite story, containing within itself a picture of human life. They are merely bold, confused, and turbulent exemplifications of certain sweeping energies and irresistible passions. They are fragments of a poet's dark dream of life. The very personages, vividly as they are pictured, are yet felt to be fictitious; and derive their chief power over us from their supposed mysterious connection with the poet himself, and, it may be added, with each other. The law of his mind is, to embody his own peculiar feelings in the forms of other men. In all his heroes we accordingly recognise—though with infinite modifications, the same great characteristics,—a high and audacious conception of the power of the mind,—an intense sensibility of passion,—an almost boundless capacity of tumultuous emotion,—a haunting admiration of the grandeur of disordered power,—and, above all, a soul-felt, blood-felt delight in beauty,—a beauty which, in his wild creations, is often scared away from the agitated surface of life by stormier passions, but which, like a bird of calm, is for ever returning, on its soft, silvery wings, before the black swell has finally subsided into sunshine and peace.

It seems to us, that this exquisite sense of beauty has of late become still more exquisite in the soul of Byron. Parisina, the most finished of

all his poems, is full of it to overflowing; — it breathes from every page of the Prisoner of Chillon; — but it is in Manfred that it riots and revels among the streams, and waterfalls, and groves, and mountains, and heavens. Irrelevant and ill-managed as many parts are of that grand drama, there is in the character of Manfred more of the self-might of Byron than in all his previous productions. He has therein brought, with wonderful power, metaphysical conceptions into forms, — and we know of no poem in which the aspect of external nature is throughout lighted up with an expression at once so beautiful, solemn, and majestic. It is the poem, next to Childe Harold, which we should give to a foreigner to read, that he might know something of Byron. Shakspeare has given to those abstractions of human life and being, which are truth in the intellect, forms of full, clear, glowing, as the idealised forms of visible nature. The very words of Ariel picture to us his beautiful being. In Manfred, we see glorious but immature manifestations of similar power. The poet there creates, with delight, thoughts and feelings and fancies into visible forms, that he may cling and cleave to them, and clasp them in his passion. The beautiful Witch of the Alps seems exhaled from the luminous spray of the Cataract, — as if the poet's eyes, unsated with the beauty of inanimate nature, gave spectral apparitions of loveliness to feed the pure passion of the poet's soul.

We speak of Manfred now, because it seems to us to hold a middle place between the tales of Byron, and Childe Harold, as far as regards the poet himself. But we likewise do so, that we may have an opportunity of saying a few words on the moral of this poem, and a few words on a subject that may scarcely seem to fall under the legitimate province of the critic, but which, in the case of this great writer, forms so profoundly interesting a part of his poetical character — we mean, his scepticisim.

The moral character of Byron's poetry has often been assailed, and we have ourselves admitted that some strong objections might be urged against it. But we think that his mind is now clearing up, like noon-day, after a stormy and disturbed morning; — and when the change which we anticipate has been fully brought about, the moral character of his poetry will be lofty and pure. Over this fine drama, a moral feeling hangs like a sombrous thunder cloud. No other guilt but that so darkly shadowed out could have furnished so dreadful an illustration of the hideous aberrations of human nature, however noble and majestic, when left a prey to its desires, its passions, and its imagination. The beauty, at one time so innocently adored, is at last soiled, profaned, and violated. Affection, love, guilt, horror, remorse, and death come in terrible succession, yet all darkly linked together. We think of Astarte as young, beautiful, innocent — guilty — lost — murdered — buried — judged — pardoned; but still, in her permitted visit to earth, speaking in a voice of sorrow, and with a countenance yet pale with mortal trouble. We had but a glimpse of her in her beauty and innocence; but, at last, she rises up before us in all the mortal silence of a ghost, with fixed, glazed, and passionless eyes, revealing death, judgment, and eternity. The moral breathes and burns in every word, — in sadness, misery, insanity, desolation, and death. The work is "instinct with spirit," — and in the agony and distraction, and all its dimly imagined causes, we behold, though broken up, confused, and shattered, the elements of a purer existence.

On the other point, namely, the dark and sceptical spirit prevalent through the works of this poet, we shall not now utter all that we feel, but rather direct the notice of our readers to it as a singular phenomenon

in the poetry of the age. Whoever has studied the spirit of Greek and Roman literature, must have been struck with the comparative disregard and indifference wherewith the thinking men of these exquisitely polished nations contemplated those subjects of darkness and mystery which afford, at some period or other of his life, so much disquiet — we had almost said so much agony — to the mind of every reflecting modern. It is difficult to account for this in any very satisfactory, and we suspect altogether impossible to do so in any strictly logical manner. In reading the works of Plato and his interpreter Cicero, we find the germs of all the doubts and anxieties to which we have alluded, so far as these are connected with the workings of our reason. The singularity is, that those clouds of darkness, which hang over the intellect, do not appear, so far as we can perceive, to have thrown at any time any very alarming shade upon the feelings or temper of the ancient sceptic. We should think a very great deal of this was owing to the brilliancy and activity of his southern fancy. The lighter spirits of antiquity, like the more mercurial of our moderns, sought refuge in mere *gaieté du cœur* and derision. The graver poets and philosophers — and poets and philosophy were in those days seldom disunited — built up some airy and beautiful system of mysticism, each following his own devices, and suiting the erection to his own peculiarities of hope and inclination; and this being once accomplished, the mind appears to have felt quite satisfied with what it had done, and to have reposed amidst the splendours of its sand-built fantastic edifice, with as much security as if it had been grooved and riveted into the rock of ages. The mere exercise of ingenuity in devising a system, furnished consolation to its creators or improvers. Lucretius is a striking example of all this; and it may be averred that, down to the time of Claudian, who lived in the fourth century of our era, in no classical writer of antiquity do there occur any traces of what moderns understand by the restlessness and discomfort of uncertainty as to the government of the world, and the future destinies of man.

There are three only, even among the great poets of modern times, who have chosen to depict, in their full shape and vigour, those agonies to which great and meditative intellects are, in the present progress of human history, exposed by the eternal recurrence of a deep and discontented scepticism. But there is only one who has dared to represent himself as the victim of these nameless and undefinable sufferings. Goethe chose for his doubts and his darkness the terrible disguise of the mysterious Faustus. Schiller, with still greatner boldness, planted the same anguish in the restless, haughty, and heroic bosom of Wallenstein. But Byron has sought no external symbol in which to embody the inquietudes of his soul. He takes the world and all that it inherit for his arena and his spectators; and he displays himself before their gaze, wrestling unceasingly and ineffectually with the demon that torments him. At times there is something mournful and depressing in his scepticism; but oftener, it is of a high and solemn character, approaching to the very verge of a confiding faith. Whatever the poet may believe, we his readers always feel ourselves too much ennobled and elevated even by his melancholy, not to be confirmed in our own belief by the very doubts so majestically conceived and uttered. His scepticism, if it ever approaches to a creed, carries with it its refutation in its grandeur. There is neither philosophy nor religion in those bitter and savage taunts which have been cruelly thrown out, from many quarters, against those moods of mind which are involuntary, and will not pass away; — the shadows and spectres which still haunt his imagination,

may once have disturbed our own; — through his gloom there are frequent flashes of illumination; — and the sublime sadness which, to him, is breathed from the mysteries of mortal existence, is always joined with a longing after immortality, and expressed in language that is itself divine.

But it is our duty now to give our readers an analysis of the concluding Canto of Childe Harold; and as it is, in our opinion, the finest of them all, our extracts shall be abundant. The poem which it brings to an end is, perhaps, the most original in the language, both in conception and execution. It is no more like Beattie's Minstrel than Paradise Lost — though the former production was in the noble author's mind when first thinking of Childe Harold. A great poet, who gives himself up, free and unconfined, to the impulses of his genius, as Byron has done in the better part of this singular creation, shows to us a spirit as it is sent out from the hands of Nature, to range over the earth and the societies of men. Even Shakspeare himself submits to the shackles of history and society. But here Byron traverses the whole earth, borne along by the whirlwind of his own spirit. Wherever a forest frowns, or a temple glitters — there he is privileged to bend his flight. He may suddenly start up from his solitary dream by the secret fountain of the desert, and descend at once into the tumult of peopled, or the silence of desolated cities. Whatever lives now — has perished heretofore — or may exist hereafter — and that has within it a power to kindle passion, may become the material of his all-embracing song. There are no unities of time or place to fetter him, — and we fly with him from hill-top to hill-top, and from tower to tower, over all the solitude of nature, and all the magnificence of art. When the past pageants of history seem too dim and faded, he can turn to the splendid spectacles that have dignified our own days; and the images of kings and conquerors of old may give place to those yet living in sovereignty or exile. Indeed, much of the power which Harold holds over us is derived from this source. He lives in a sort of sympathy with the public mind — sometimes wholly distinct from it — sometimes acting in opposition to it — sometimes blending with it, — but at all times, in all his thoughts and actions, having a reference to the public mind. His spirit need not go back into the past, — though it often does so, — to bring the objects of its love back to earth in more beautiful life. The existence he paints is — now. The objects he presents are marked out to him by men's present regards. It is his to speak of all those great political events which have been objects of such passionate sympathy to the nation. And when he does speak of them, he either gives us back our own feelings, raised into powerful poetry, or he endeavours to displace them from our breasts, and to substitute others of his own. In either case, it is a living speaker standing up before us, and ruling our minds. But chiefly he speaks our own feelings, exalted in thought, language, and passion. The whole substance and basis of his poem is, therefore, popular. All the scenes through which he has travelled were, at the very moment, of strong interest to the public mind, and that interest still hangs over them. His travels were not, at first, the self-impelled act of a mind severing itself in lonely roaming from all participation with the society to which it belonged, but rather obeying the general motion of the mind of that society. The southern regions of Europe have been like a world opening upon us with fresh and novel beauty, and our souls have enjoyed themselves there, of late years, with a sort of romantic pleasure. This fanciful and romantic feeling was common to those who went

to see those countries, and to those who remained at home to hear the narrations of the adventurers, — so that all the Italian, Grecian, Peninsular, Ionian, and Ottoman feeling which pervades Childe Harold, singularly suited as it is to the genius of Byron, was not first brought upon the English mind by the power of that genius, but was there already in great force and activity.

There can be no limits set to the interest that attaches to a great poet thus going forth, like a spirit, from the heart of a powerful and impassioned people, to range among the objects and events to them most pregnant with passion, — who is, as it were, the representative of our most exalted intellect, — and who often seems to disclose within ourselves that splendour with which he invests our own ordinary conceptions. The consciousness that he is so considered by a great people, must give a kingly power and confidence to a poet. He feels himself entitled, and, as it were, elected to survey the phenomena of the times, and to report upon them in poetry. He is the speculator of the passing might and greatness of his own generation. But though he speaks to the public, at all times, he does not consider them as his judges. He looks upon them as sentient existences that are important to his poetical existence, — but, so that he command their feelings and passions, he cares not for their censure or their praise, — for his fame is more than mere literary fame; and he aims in poetry, like the fallen chief whose image is so often before him, at universal dominion, we had almost said, universal tyranny, over the minds of men.†

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The Pilgrimage of Childe Harold has now been brought to its close; and of his character there remains nothing more to be laid open to our view. It is impossible to reflect on the years which have elapsed since this mysterious stranger was first introduced to our acquaintance, without feeling that our own spirits have undergone in that time many mighty changes — sorrowful in some it may be, in others happy changes. Neither can we be surprised, knowing as we well do who Childe Harold is, that he also has been changed. He represented himself, from the beginning, as a ruin: and when we first gazed upon him, we saw indeed in abundance the black traces of recent violence and convulsion. The edifice has not been rebuilt; but its hues have been sobered by the passing wings of time, and the calm slow ivy has had leisure to wreathe the soft green of its melancholy among the fragments of the decay. In so far, the Pilgrim has become wiser. He seems to think more of others, and with a greater spirit of humanity. There was something tremendous, and almost fiendish, in the air with which he surveyed the first scenes of his wanderings; and no proof of the strength of genius was ever exhibited so strong and unquestionable, as the sudden and entire possession of the minds of Englishmen by such a being as he then appeared to be. He looked upon a bull-fight and a field of battle with no variety of emotion. Brutes and men were, in his eyes, the same blind, stupid victims of the savage lust of power. He seemed to shut his eyes to every thing of that citizenship and patriotism which ennobles the spirit of the soldier, and to delight in scattering the dust and ashes of his derision over all the most sacred resting-places of the soul of man.

Even then, we must allow, the original spirit of the Englishman and the

† The extracts from the poem, with the connecting observations, many of which are exceedingly beautiful, I have not space to attach to this Essay. I have given the concluding passages of the *critique* without abridgment.

poet broke triumphantly, at times, through the chilling mist in which it had been spontaneously enveloped. In Greece, above all, the contemplation of Athens, Salamis, Marathon, Thermopylæ, and Platea, subdued the prejudices of him who had gazed unmoved upon the recent glories of Trafalgar and Talavera. The nobility of manhood appeared to delight this moody visitant; and he accorded, without reluctance, to the shades of long-departed heroes that reverent homage, which, in the strange mixture of envy and scorn wherewith the contemplative so often regard active men, he had refused to the living, or to the newly dead.

At all times, however, the sympathy and respect of Childe Harold, — when these have been excited by any circumstances external to himself — have been given almost exclusively to the intellectual, and refused to the moral, greatness of his species. There is certainly less of this in his last Canto. Yet we think that the ruins of Rome might have excited within him not a few glorious recollections, quite apart from those vague lamentations and worshippings of imperial power, which occupy so great a part of the conclusion of his Pilgrimage. The stern purity and simplicity of domestic manners — the devotion of male and female bosoms — the very names of Lucretia, Valeria, and the mother of the Gracchi, have a charm about them at least as enduring as any others, and a thousand times more delightful than all the iron memories of conquerors and consuls. But the mind must have something to admire — some breathing-place of veneration — some idol, whether of demon or of divinity, before which it is its pride to bow. Byron has chosen too often to be the undoubting adorer of power. The idea of tyrannic and unquestioned sway seems to be the secret delight of his spirit. He would pretend, indeed, to be a republican, — but his heroes are all stamped with the leaden signet of despotism; and we sometimes see the most cold, secluded, immitigable tyrant of the whole lurking beneath the "scallop-shell and sandal-shoon" of the Pilgrim himself.

In every mien and gesture of this dark being, we discover the traces of one that has known the delights and sympathised with the possessors of intellectual power; but too seldom any vestiges of a mind that delights in the luxuries of quiet virtue, or that could repose itself in the serenity of home. The very possession of purity would sometimes almost seem to degrade, in his eyes, the intellectual greatness with which it has been sometimes allied. He speaks of Pompey with less reverence than Cæsar; and, in spite of many passing visitings of anger and of scorn, it is easy to see that, of all contemporary beings, there is ONE only with whom he is willing to acknowledge mental sympathy — one only whom he looks upon with real reverence — one only whose fortunes touch the inmost sanctuaries of his proud soul — and that this one is no other than that powerful, unintelligible, unrivalled spirit, who, had he possessed either private virtue or public moderation, might still have been in a situation to despise the offerings of even such a worshipper as Harold.

But there would be no end of descanting on the character of the Pilgrim, nor of the moral reflections which it awakens. Of the poet himself, the completion of this wonderful performance inspires us with lofty and magnificent hopes. It is most assuredly in his power to build up a work that shall endure among the most august fabrics of the genius of England. Indeed, the impression which the collective poetry of our own age makes upon our minds is, that it contains great promise of the future; and that, splendid as many of its achievements have been, some of our living poets seem destined still higher to exalt the imaginative character of their countrymen. When we look back, and compare the languid, faint, cold

delineations of the very justest and finest subjects of inspiration in the poetry of the first half of the last century, with the warm, life-flushed and life-breathing pictures of our own, we feel that a great accession has been made to the literature of our day, — an accession not only of delight, but of power. We cannot resist the persuasion, that if literature, in any great degree, impresses and nourishes the character of a people, — then this literature of ours, pregnant as it is with living impressions, — gathered from Nature in all her varieties of awfulness and beauty, — gathered too from those high and dread passions of men, which our ordinary life scarcely shows, and indeed could scarcely bear, but which, nevertheless, have belonged, and do belong, to our human life, — and held up in the powerful representations of the poets to our consciousness at times, when the deadening pressure of the days that are going by might bereave us of all genial hope and all dignified pride, — we say it is impossible for us to resist the belief that such pregnant, glowing, powerful poetry, must carry influences into the heart of this generation, even like those which are breathed from the heart of Nature herself, — or like those which lofty passions leave behind them in bosoms which they have once possessed. The same spirit of poetical passion which so uniformly marks the works of all our living poets, must exist very widely among those who do not aspire to the name of genius; it must be very widely diffused throughout the age, and, as we think, must very materially influence the reality of life. Yet, highly as we estimate the merits of our modern poetry, it is certain that the age has not yet produced any one great epic or tragic performance. Vivid and just delineations of passion there are in abundance, — but of moments of passions — fragments of representation. The giant grasp of thought, which conceives, and brings into full and perfect life, full and perfect passion — passion pervading alike action and character, through a majestic series of events, and at the same time cast in the mould of grand imagination, — this seems not to be of our age. In the delineation of external nature, which, in a poet's soul, requires rather moral beauty than intellectual strength, this age has excelled. But it has produced no poem gloriously illustrative of the agencies, existences, and events, of the complex life of man. It has no Lear — no Macbeth — no Othello. Some such glory as this Byron may yet live to bring over his own generation. His being has in it all the elements of the highest poetry. And that being he enjoys in all the strength of its prime. We might almost say, that he needs but to exercise his will to construct a great poem. There is, however, much for him to alter in what may be called his Theory of Imagination respecting Human Life. Some idols of his own setting-up he has himself overthrown. There are yet some others, partly of gold and partly of clay, which should be dashed against the floor of the sanctuary. We have already spoken of his personal character, as it shines forth in his poetry. This personal character exists in the nature of his imagination, and may therefore be modified — purified — dignified by his own will. His imagination does, to his own eyes, invest him with an unreal character. Purposes, passions, loves, deeds, events, may seem great and paramount in imagination, which have yet no power to constrain to action; and those which perhaps may govern our actions, vanish altogether from our imagination. There is a region — a world — a sphere of being in imagination, which, to our real life, is no more than the world of a dream; yet, long as we are held in it by the transport of our delusion, we live, not in delight only, but in the conscious exaltation of our nature. It is in this world that the spirit of Byron must work a reformation for itself. He knows,

far better than we can tell him, what have been the most hallowed objects of love and of passion to the souls of great poets in the most splendid eras of poetry, — and he also knows well, that those objects, if worshipped by him with becoming and steadfast reverence, will repay the worship which they receive, by the more fervent and divine inspiration which they kindle. *

ON THE IMMORAL TENDENCY OF LORD BYRON'S POETRY.†

We have a word or two to say on the griefs of Lord Byron. He complains bitterly of the detraction by which he has been assailed — and intimates that his works have been received by the public with far less cordiality and favour than he was entitled to expect. We are constrained to say, that this appears to us a very extraordinary mistake. In the whole course of our experience, we cannot recollect a single author who has had so little reason to complain of his reception — to whose genius the public has been so early and so constantly just — to whose faults they have been so long and so singularly indulgent. From the very first, he must have been aware that he offended the principles and shocked the prejudices of the majority, by his sentiments, as much as he delighted them by his talents. Yet there never was an author so universally and warmly applauded, so gently admonished — so kindly entreated to look more heedfully to his opinions. He took the praise, as usual, and rejected the advice. As he grew in fame and authority, he aggravated all his offences — clung more fondly to all he had been reproached with — and only took leave of Childe Harold to ally himself to Don Juan! That he has since been talked of, in public and in private, with less unmingled admiration — that his name is now mentioned as often for censure as for praise — and that the exultation with which his countrymen once hailed the greatest of our living poets, is now alloyed by the recollection of the tendency of his writings — is matter of notoriety to all the world; but matter of surprise, we should imagine, to nobody but Lord Byron himself.

He would fain persuade himself, indeed, that this decline of his popularity — or rather this stain upon its lustre — for he is still popular beyond all other example — and it is only because he is so that we feel any interest in this discussion; — he wishes to believe, that he is indebted for the censures that have reached him, not to any actual demerits of his own, but to the jealousy of those he has supplanted, the envy of those he has outshone, or the party rancour of those against whose corruptions he has testified; — while, at other times, he seems inclined to insinuate, that it is chiefly because he is a *gentleman* and a *nobleman* that plebeian cen-

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* Professor Wilson is known to be the author of this essay, the first, I believe, and the last of his contributions to the Edinburgh Review. Those who wish to refer to the numerous *critiques* in the Edinburgh Review on Lord Byron's works will find them in Vol. xi. p. 285.; Vol. xix. p. 466.; Vol. xxi. p. 299.; Vol. xxiii. p. 198.; Vol. xxvii. p. 277.; Vol. xxviii. p. 418.; Vol. xxix. p. 302.; Vol. xxx. p. 87.; Vol. xxxv. p. 271.; Vol. xxxvi. p. 413.; Vol. xxxviii. p. 27.

† Sardanapalus, a Tragedy. By Lord Byron. — Vol. xxxvi. p. 413. February, 1822.

sors have conspired to bear him down! We scarcely think, however, that these theories will pass with Lord Byron himself — we are sure they will pass with no other person. They are so manifestly inconsistent as mutually to destroy each other — and so weak, as to be quite insufficient to account for the fact, even if they could be effectually combined for that purpose. *The party* that Lord Byron has offended, bears no malice to lords and gentlemen. Against its rancour, on the contrary, these qualities have undoubtedly been his best protection; and had it not been for them, he may be assured that he would, long ere now, have been shown up in the pages of the Quarterly, with the same candour and liberality that has there been exercised towards his friend Lady Morgan. That the base and the bigoted — those whom he has darkened by his glory, spited by his talent, or mortified by his neglect — have taken advantage of the prevailing disaffection, to vent their puny malice in silly nicknames and vulgar scurrility, is natural and true. But Lord Byron may depend upon it, that the dissatisfaction is not confined to them, — and, indeed, that they would never have had the courage to assail one so immeasurably their superior, if he had not at once made himself vulnerable by his errors, and alienated his natural defenders by his obstinate adherence to them. *We* are not bigots, nor rival poets. We have not been detractors from Lord Byron's fame, nor the friends of his detractors; and *we* tell him — far more in sorrow than in anger — that we verily believe the great body of the English nation — the religious, the moral, and the candid part of it — consider the tendency of his writings to be immoral and pernicious — and look upon his perseverance in that strain of composition with regret and reprehension. We ourselves are not easily startled, either by levity of temper, or boldness, or even rashness of remark; we are, moreover, most sincere admirers of Lord Byron's genius — and have always felt a pride and an interest in his fame. But we cannot dissent from the censure to which we have alluded; and shall endeavour to explain, in as few and as temperate words as possible, the grounds upon which we rest our concurrence.

He has no priestlike cant or priestlike reviling to apprehend from us. We do not charge him with being either a disciple or an apostle of Satan; nor do we describe his poetry as a mere compound of blasphemy and obscenity. On the contrary, we are inclined to believe that he wishes well to the happiness of mankind — and are glad to testify, that his poems abound with sentiments of great dignity and tenderness, as well as passages of infinite sublimity and beauty. But their general tendency we believe to be in the highest degree pernicious; and we even think that it is chiefly by means of the fine and lofty sentiments they contain, that they acquire their most fatal power of corruption. This may sound at first, perhaps, like a paradox; bnt we are mistaken if we shall not make it intelligible enough in the end.

We think there are indecencies and indelicacies, seductive descriptions and profligate representations, which are extremely reprehensible; and also audacious speculations, and erroneous and uncharitable assertions, equally indefensible. But if these had stood alone, and if the whole body of his works had been made up of gaudy ribaldry and flashy scepticism, the mischief, we think, would have been much less than it is. He is not more obscene, perhaps, than Dryden or Prior, and other classical and pardoned writers; nor is there any passage in the history even of Don Juan, so degrading as Tom Jones's affair with Lady Bellaston. It is, no doubt, a wretched apology for the indecencies of a man of genius, that equal indecencies have been forgiven to his predecessors: but the precedent

of lenity might have been followed; and we might have passed both the levity and the voluptuousness — the dangerous warmth of his romantic situations, and the scandal of his cold-blooded dissipation. It might not have been so easy to get over his dogmatic scepticism — his hard-hearted maxims of misanthropy — his cold-blooded and eager expositions of the non-existence of virtue and honour. Even this, however, might have been comparatively harmless, if it had not been accompanied by that which may look, at first sight, as a palliation — the frequent presentment of the most touching pictures of tenderness, generosity, and faith.

The charge we bring against Lord Byron, in short, is, that his writings have a tendency to destroy all belief in the reality of virtue — and to make all enthusiasm and constancy of affection ridiculous; and that this is effected not merely by direct maxims and examples of an imposing or seducing kind, but by the constant exhibition of the most profligate heartlessness in the persons of those who had been transiently represented as actuated by the purest and most exalted emotions — and in the lessons of that very teacher who had been, but a moment before, so beautifully pathetic in the expression of the loftiest conceptions. When a rash and gay voluptuary descants, somewhat too freely, on the intoxications of love and wine, we ascribe his excesses to the effervescence of youthful spirits, and do not consider him as seriously impeaching either the value or the reality of the severer virtues: and in the same way, when the satirist deals out his sarcasms against the sincerity of human professions, and unmasks the secret infirmities of our bosoms, we consider this as aimed at hypocrisy, and not at mankind: or, at all events, and in either case, we consider the sensualist and the misanthrope as wandering, each in his own delusion — and pity those who have never known the charms of a tender or generous affection. The true antidote to such seductive or revolting views of human nature is, to turn to the scenes of its nobleness and attraction; and to reconcile ourselves again to our kind, by listening to the accents of pure affection and incorruptible honour. But if those accents have flowed, in all their sweetness, from the very lips that instantly open again to mock and blaspheme them, the antidote is mingled with the poison, and the draught is the more deadly for the mixture.

The reveller may pursue his orgies, and the wanton display her enchantments, with comparative safety to those around them, while they know or believe that there are purer and higher enjoyments, and teachers and followers of a happier way. But if the priest pass from the altar, with persuasive exhortations to peace and purity still trembling on his tongue, to join familiarly in the grossest and most profane debauchery — if the matron, who has charmed all hearts by the lovely sanctimonies of her conjugal and maternal endearments, glides out from the circle of her children, and gives bold and shameless way to the most abandoned and degrading vices — our notions of right and wrong are at once confounded — our confidence in virtue shaken to the foundations — and our reliance on truth and fidelity at an end for ever.

This is the charge which we bring against Lord Byron. We say that, under some strange misapprehension as to the truth, and the duty of proclaiming it, he has exerted all the powers of his powerful mind to convince his readers both directly and indirectly, that all ennobling pursuits, and disinterested virtues, are mere deceits or illusions — hollow and despicable mockeries for the most part, and, at best, but laborious follies. Love, patriotism, valour, devotion, constancy, ambition — all are to be laughed at, disbelieved in, and despised! — and nothing is really good, so far as we can

gather, but a succession of dangers to stir the blood, and of banquets and intrigues to soothe it again! If this doctrine stood alone, with its examples, it would revolt, we believe, more than it would seduce: — but the author of it has the unlucky gift of personating all those sweet and lofty illusions, and that with such grace and force and truth to nature, that it is impossible not to suppose, for the time, that he is among the most devoted of their votaries — till he casts off the character with a jerk — and, the moment after he has moved and exalted us to the very height of our conception, resumes his mockery at all things serious or sublime — and lets us down at once on some coarse joke, hard-hearted sarcasm, or fierce and relentless personality — as if on purpose to show

"Whoe'er was edified, himself was not." —

or to demonstrate practically as it were, and by example, how possible it is to have all fine and noble feelings, or their appearance, for a moment, and yet retain no particle of respect for them — or of belief in their intrinsic worth or permanent reality. Thus, we have an indelicate but very clever scene of the young Juan's concealment in the bed of an amorous matron, and of the torrent of "rattling and audacious eloquence" with which she repels the too just suspicions of her jealous lord. All this is merely comic, and a little coarse: — but then the poet chooses to make this shameless and abandoned woman address to her young gallant an epistle breathing the very spirit of warm, devoted, pure, and unalterable love — thus profaning the holiest language of the heart, and indirectly associating it with the most hateful and degrading sensuality. In like manner, the sublime and terrific description of the shipwreck is strangely and disgustingly broken by traits of low humour and buffoonery; — and we pass immediately from the moans of an agonising father fainting over his famished son, to facetious stories of Juan's begging a paw of his father's dog — and refusing a slice of his tutor! — as if it were a fine thing to be hard-hearted — and pity and compassion were fit only to be laughed at. In the same spirit, the glorious ode on the aspirations of Greece after liberty, is instantly followed up by a strain of dull and cold-blooded ribaldry; — and we are hurried on from the distraction and death of Haidee to merry scenes of intrigue and masquerading in the seraglio. Thus all good feelings are excited only to accustom us to their speedy and complete extinction; and we are brought back from their transient and theatrical exhibition, to the staple and substantial doctrine of the work — the non-existence of constancy in women or honour in men, and the folly of expecting to meet with any such virtues, or of cultivating them for an undeserving world; — and all this mixed up with so much wit and cleverness, and knowledge of human nature, as to make it irresistibly pleasant and plausible — while there is not only no antidote supplied, but every thing that might have operated in that way has been anticipated, and presented already in as strong and engaging a form as possible — but under such associations as to rob it of all efficacy, or even turn it into an auxiliary of the poison.

This is our sincere opinion of much of Lord Byron's most splendid poetry — a little exaggerated, perhaps, in the expression, from a desire to make our exposition clear and impressive — but, in substance, we think, merited and correct. We have already said, and we deliberately repeat, that we have no notion that Lord Byron had any mischievous intention in these publications — and readily acquit him of any wish to corrupt the morals or impair the happiness of his readers. Such a wish, indeed, is

in itself altogether inconceivable: but it is our duty, nevertheless, to say, that much of what he has published appears to us to have this tendency — and that we are acquainted with no writings so well calculated to extinguish in young minds all generous enthusiasm and gentle affection — all respect for themselves, and all love for their kind — to make them practise and profess hardily what it teaches them to suspect in others — and actually to persuade them that it is wise and manly and knowing, to laugh, not only at self-denial and restraint, but at all aspiring ambition, and all warm and constant affection.

How opposite to this is the system, or the temper, of the great author of Waverley — the only living individual to whom Lord Byron must submit to be ranked as inferior in genius — and still more deplorably inferior in all that makes genius either amiable in itself or useful to society! With all his unrivalled power of invention and judgment, of pathos and pleasantry, the tenor of his sentiments is uniformly generous, indulgent, and good-humoured; and so remote from the bitterness of misanthropy, that he never indulges in sarcasm, and scarcely, in any case, carries his merriment so far as derision. But the peculiarity by which he stands most broadly and proudly distinguished from Lord Byron is, that, beginning, as he frequently does, with some ludicrous or satirical theme, he never fails to raise out of it some feelings of a generous or gentle kind, and to end by exciting our tender pity or deep respect for those very individuals or classes of persons who seemed at first to be brought on the stage for our mere sport and amusement — thus making the ludicrous itself subservient to the cause of benevolence — and inculcating, at every turn, and as the true end and result of all his trials and experiments, the love of our kind, and the duty and delight of a cordial and genuine sympathy, with the joys and sorrows of every condition of men. It seems to be Lord Byron's way, on the contrary, never to excite a kind or a noble sentiment, without making haste to obliterate it by a torrent of unfeeling mockery or relentless abuse, and taking pains to show how well those passing fantasies may be reconciled to a system of resolute misanthropy, or so managed as even to enhance its merits, or confirm its truth. With what different sensations, accordingly, do we read the works of these two great writers! —With the one, we seem to share a gay and gorgeous banquet — with the other, a wild and dangerous intoxication. Let Lord Byron bethink him of this contrast — and its causes and effects. Though he scorns the precepts, and defies the censure of ordinary men, he may yet be moved by *the example* of his only superior! — In the mean time, we have endeavoured to point out the canker that stains the splendid flowers of his poetry — or, rather, the serpent that lurks beneath them. If it will not listen to the voice of the charmer, that brilliant garden, gay and glorious as it is, must be deserted, and its existence deplored, as a snare to the unwary.

There is a minor blemish, of which we meant to say something also — but it is scarcely worth while — we mean the outrageous, and, till he set the example, the unprecedented *personalities* in which this noble author indulges. We have already noticed the ferocity of his attacks on Mr. Southey. The Laureate had railed at him, indeed, before; but he had railed "in good set terms;" — and, if we recollect right, had not even mentioned his lordship's name. It was all, in his exquisite way, by innuendo. In spite of this, we do not mean to deny that Lord Byron had a right to name Mr. Southey — but he had no right to say any thing of Mr. Southey's wife; and the mention of her, and of many other

people, is cruel, coarse, and unhandsome. If his lordship's sense of propriety does not cure him of this propensity, we hope his pride may: for the practice has gone down to such imitators, as can do him no honour in pointing to him as their original. We rather think it would be better, after all, to be called the founder of the Satanic School, than the master of the John Bulls, Beacons, and Sentinels.

SCOTT'S MARMION.*

THERE is a kind of right of primogeniture among books, as well as among men; and it is difficult for an author who has obtained great fame by a first publication, not to appear to fall off in a second — especially if his original success could be imputed, in any degree, to the novelty of his plan of composition. The public is always indulgent to untried talents; and is even apt to exaggerate a little the value of what it receives without any previous expectation. But, for this advance of kindness, it usually exacts a most usurious return in the end. When the poor author comes back, he is no longer received as a benefactor, but a debtor. In return for the credit it formerly gave him, the world now conceives that it has a just claim on him for excellence, and becomes impertinently scrupulous as to the quality of the coin in which it is to be paid.

The just amount of this claim plainly cannot be for more than the rate of excellence which he had reached in his former production; but, in estimating this rate, various errors are perpetually committed, which increase the difficulties of the task which is thus imposed on him. In the *first* place, the comparative amount of his past and present merits can only be ascertained by the uncertain standard of his reader's feelings; and these must always be less lively with regard to a second performance; which, with every other excellence of the first, must necessarily want the powerful recommendations of novelty and surprise, and, consequently, fall very far short of the effect produced by their strong co-operation. In the *second* place, it may be observed, in general, that wherever our impression of any work is favourable on the whole, its excellence is constantly exaggerated, in those vague and habitual recollections which form the basis of subsequent comparisons. We readily drop from our memory the dull and bad passages, and carry along with us the remembrance of those only which had afforded us delight. Thus, when we take the merit of any favourite poem as a standard of comparison for some later production of the same author, we never take its true average merit, which is the only fair standard, but the merit of its most striking and memorable passages, which naturally stand forward in our recollection, and pass upon our hasty retrospect as just and characteristic specimens of the whole work; and this high and exaggerated standard, we rigorously apply to the first and perhaps the least interesting parts of the second performance. Finally, it deserves to be noticed that where a first work, containing considerable blemishes, has been favourably received, the public always expects this indulgence to be repaid by an improvement

* Marmion; a Tale of Flodden Field. By Walter Scott, Esq.— Vol. xii. p. 1. April, 1808.

that ought not to be always expected. If a second performance appear, therefore, with the same faults, they will no longer meet with the same toleration. Murmurs will be heard about indolence, presumption, and abuse of good nature; while the critics, and those who had gently hinted at the necessity of correction, will be more out of humour than the rest at this apparent neglect of their admonitions.

For these, and for other reasons, we are inclined to suspect, that the success of the work now before us will be less brilliant than that of the author's former publication, though we are ourselves of opinion, that its intrinsic merits are nearly, if not altogether, equal; and that, if it had had the fortune to be the elder born, it would have inherited as fair a portion of renown as has fallen to the lot of its predecessor. It is a good deal longer, indeed, and somewhat more ambitious; and it is rather clearer that it has greater faults, than that it has greater beauties; though, for our own parts, we are inclined to believe in both propositions. It has more tedious and flat passages, and more ostentation of historical and antiquarian lore; but it has also greater richness and variety, both of character and incident; and if it has less sweetness and pathos in the softer passages, it has certainly more vehemence and force of colouring in the loftier and busier representations of action and emotion. The place of the prologuising minstrel is but ill supplied, indeed, by the epistolary dissertations which are prefixed to each book of the present poem; and the ballad pieces and mere episodes which it contains, have less finish and poetical beauty; but there is more airiness and spirit in the lighter delineations; and the story, if not more skilfully conducted, is at least better complicated, and extended through a wider field of adventure. The characteristics of both, however, are evidently the same;—a broken narrative — a redundancy of minute description — bursts of unequal and energetic poetry — and a general tone of spirit and animation, unchecked by timidity or affectation, and unchastised by any great delicacy of taste, or elegance of fancy.

But though we think this last romance of Mr. Scott's about as good as the former, and allow that it affords great indications of poetical talent, we must remind our readers, that we never entertained much partiality for this sort of composition, and ventured on a former occasion to express our regret, that an author endowed with such talents should consume them in imitations of obsolete extravagance, and in the representation of manners and sentiments in which none of his readers can be supposed to take much interest, except the few who can judge of their exactness. To write a modern romance of chivalry, seems to be much such a fantasy as to build a modern abbey, or an English pagoda. For once, however, it may be excused as a pretty caprice of genius; but a second production of the same sort is entitled to less indulgence, and imposes a sort of duty to drive the author from so idle a task, by a fair exposition of the faults which are in a manner inseparable from its execution. To enable our readers to judge fairly of the present performance, we shall first present them with a brief abstract of the story; and then endeavour to point out what seems to be exceptionable, and what is praiseworthy, in the execution.

Lord Marmion, the fictitious hero of the poem, was an English knight of great rank, fortune, and prowess, in the reign of Henry VIII., and had, some years before the opening of the narrative, seduced, and carried off from her convent, Constance de Beverley, a professed nun of good family, whom he had afterwards retained about his person in the disguise of a page. At the end of three years, however, he falls in love

with the fair face, or the broad lands, of Clara de Clare, a damsel of great merit, whose affections, however, were previously engaged to Ralph de Wilton, a valiant knight in her neighbourhood. Marmion can think of no better way of disposing of this rival, than to employ Constance to put a parcel of forged letters, importing treasonable practices, into his portfolio, and thereafter to arraign him of those offences before their jealous sovereign. The forged papers give credit to this accusation; and the matter is referred to the judgment of God by a single combat between the two parties. In this contest the treacherous Marmion is victorious; and the true De Wilton, who is supposed to die of his wounds, assumes the dress of a palmer, and wanders from shrine to shrine, brooding over his unmerited disgrace and his natural purposes of revenge. Constance, in the mean while, who had lent herself to this scheme for promoting the marriage of Marmion, only to make herself mistress of a secret which gave her power over his life, now resolves to gratify her own jealousy and envy by the destruction of the rival who had supplanted her in the heart of her seducer. She therefore engages a wicked monk in a plot to murder the Lady Clare; but before she can carry it into execution, she is delivered up by Marmion, now satiated with her beauty, and wearied out with her murmurs, to the spiritual superiors from whom she had fled, and by whom this new crime of projected murder is speedily detected. The Lady Clare, in the mean time, full of sorrow for De Wilton, and of horror at his conqueror, had retired into the convent of Whitby, with the intention of taking the veil; and Lord Marmion, bearing down remorse with pride and ambition, was proceeding on an embassy from his sovereign to the court of James IV. of Scotland, to enquire into the cause of the great levy of troops which that prince was making, and the destination of the vast army which he had assembled in the neighbourhood of his capital.

Such is the situation of matters at the commencement of the poem, which opens with the arrival of Lord Marmion, and his train, at the castle of Norham, upon the Tweed, the last English post upon his road, where he takes up his quarters on a fine summer evening, in the year of our Lord 1513. The whole first canto is taken up with the description of his train, and his reception and entertainment in the castle; every minute particular of which, from the letting down the drawbridge, and bringing in the venison pasties for supper, down to the presentation of the stirrup cup at parting in the morning, is recorded with the most anxious and scrupulous exactness. While at table, he asks his host to provide him a guide to the Scottish court; and after some consultation, a holy palmer is introduced for this purpose, who afterwards turns out to be his injured rival De Wilton, although so much disguised by his dress, beard, and misery as not to be recognised by his oppressor. This is the only incident in the first canto that can be said to bear at all upon the business of the poem. It ends with the departure of the embassy on the following morning, under the guidance of the mysterious palmer.

In the Second Canto, we entirely drop Lord Marmion and his retinue, in order to attend to the voyage of Clara, and the fate of Constance. This poor lady had been detected in her plot against her rival in the monastery of Holy Isle; and a chapter of the adjoining superiors had been summoned, to pass sentence on her for this crime, and for the breach of her monastic vows. The canto begins with a picture of the voyage of the abbess of Whitby, to assist at this tragical convocation. There is then a description of the abbey at Holy Isle, and an abstract

of the legends connected with the history of its saints, and with those of the rival foundation of Whitby. Then comes the condemnation of Constance and her auxiliary monk. The judges assemble in a low, dark vault, paved with tombstones, and lighted with an iron chandelier, where two deep niches already appear in the massive walls with stones and mortar laid, ready to immure the convicted delinquents. The monk howls and shrieks with unmanly and unheeded agonies of terror; but Constance maintains a lofty and heroic resolution. She discloses the whole perfidy of Marmion, in his accusation of De Wilton, and his baseness to herself: she expresses little penitence for her own conspiracy against the blameless Lady Clare; but after arraigning her judges of bigoted cruelty, and prophesying the speedy downfall of their power, she receives sentence * from the stern blind abbot of Lindisfarn, and is left to expiate her offences in the gloomy sepulchre to which she is committed.

In the Third Canto, we return again to Lord Marmion and the Palmer, who guides him in silence across the Border, and to the village of Gifford, in East Lothian, where the train halts for the night at a country inn. Here the ghastly visage and keen steady eye of the Palmer disturbs the soul of Marmion, and awes the whole band into silence. Marmion tries to relieve this by calling on one of his squires for a song; but is still further annoyed, when he pitches upon a favourite air of Constance, and sings about the vengeance that is reserved for those who are perfidious in love. The host then tells a long story of a rencontre which took place in the neighbourhood, between King Alexander III. and a spirit in the shape of Edward I. of England, in which the Scottish monarch discomfited his unearthly antagonist, and forced him to reveal the fortune that awaited him in the war in which he was engaged with the Danes. He concludes with saying that any knight who will repair at midnight to the same spot, and blow his bugle of defiance, will still be encountered by an aerial representation of his greatest enemy; and, if victorious, may learn from him the destiny of his future life. Marmion is unable to sleep after hearing all these stories; and rising in the night, mounts his charger, and gallops to the appointed ground, where he is encountered by the figure of De Wilton, and unhorsed in the first shock. His foe, however, spares his life, and disappears; and the astonished champion returns sullenly to his train. The reader will probably guess, what is afterwards related at length, that this unexpected opponent was no other than the real De Wilton himself, who had heard Marmion ride out, and, suspecting his purpose, had put off his Palmer's dress, and borrowing the arms and the steed of one of his sleeping attendants, had followed, and answered his challenge.

The Fourth Canto pursues the march of Marmion to the Scottish court. In his way, he meets the chief herald, or Lyon King at Arms of Scotland, who had been despatched to attend him, and who conducts him to a castle a few miles from Edinburgh, where he is to reside for a day or two, till the King is at leisure to receive him. Here the Lord Lyon tells a strange story, of a vision which had recently appeared to his

* We were a little surprised at the words of this sentence, "Sinful sister, part in peace!" which sounds more like a merciful dismissal than a condemnation. On looking into the notes, we find Mr. Scott has adopted this *formula* from what we humbly conceive to be a *mistranslation* of the Latin *vade in pacem*, which does not signify, part in peace, but, "go *into* peace," or into eternal rest; a pretty intelligible *mittimus* to another world.

sovereign at Linlithgow, warning him not to persist in his warlike resolutions; which Marmion repays, by recounting his night adventure at Gifford. At last they take the way to Edinburgh: and the Canto ends with a spirited description of the appearance of that city and the adjoining landscape, as it appears on gaining the summit of the hills that rise above it on the south, and of the great army that then lay encamped between the bottom of these hills and the walls.

The Fifth Canto begins with a more exact and detailed description of the different bands and sorts of forces through which Marmion passed in his way to the city. In the evening he is conducted to the court, which, as well as the person of the Scottish monarch, is described with great spirit and vivacity. He is then told, that his sovereign's aggressions on the Border have been such as to leave little hope of accommodation; but that he is to take up his residence in Lord Angus's castle of Tantallon till the return of the herald who had been sent to complain of these injuries, and to denounce desperate hostility, if they were not instantly repaired. We now learn, too, that the Lady Abbess of Whitby, returning by sea with the Lady Clare, from the condemnation of poor Constance, had been captured by a Scottish privateer, and brought to Edinburgh, to await the disposal of the sovereign. These unfortunate persons are now put under the charge of Lord Marmion, and directed to remain with him at Tantallon, and to be conducted by him to their respective homes, upon his final return to England. The Abbess, who had received from the dying Constance the written proofs of the perfidy of Marmion and the innocence of De Wilton, is fearful that these documents may fall into the hands of that unprincipled warrior, and, in her distress, applies to the Palmer, to whom she narrates the whole story, and puts the papers into his hands, that they may be presented to Cardinal Wolsey, or the King, and Clara be delivered from the suit of so unworthy an admirer. The conference of these holy persons, which takes place in a gallery looking down on the street, is suddenly broken off by a strange apparition of figures like heralds and pursuivants, who glide through the air, and, taking their station at the market-cross, summon the Scottish king and most of his nobles, together with Marmion and De Wilton, to appear before the throne of their Sovereign within forty days. The Palmer protests and appeals against this citation. The train afterwards proceeds to Tantallon, the Abbess being dropped at a convent in the way; and Marmion growing impatient at the delay of the Scottish herald, and learning that James had advanced into Northumberland at the head of a great army, and that Lord Surrey had marched to oppose him, resolves to join the latter army without further delay, and to stay no longer in the castle of Lord Angus, whose demeanour he observed had recently become very cold and disrespectful.

In the beginning of the last Canto, which is by far the busiest, we learn, that De Wilton, who had obtained the proofs of his innocence from the Abbess, had told his story to Lord Angus, who had agreed to restore him to the rank of knighthood, and, for that purpose, had sought out a suit of old armour, with which he proposed to invest him, and send him forth armed to the English host. Over this armour, as it lay in the castle-yard, to be watched by the knightly candidate, the Lady Clare first stumbles, and then moralises; when, behold, De Wilton himself stands before her, and, in a few words, recounts his disastrous story, and clears his injured fame. Clara assists in accoutring him as a knight; and forth he rides in the morning on an old steed of the Earl's. Marmion, in the mean time, gets his band set in order, and presents himself to take

closure or revenge. So far from meditating any thing of the sort, he makes two several efforts to leave him, when it appears that his services are no longer indispensable. If his accidental meeting, and continued association with Marmion, be altogether unnatural, it must appear still more extraordinary, that he should afterwards meet with the Lady Clare, his adored mistress, and the Abbess of Whitby, who had in her pocket the written proofs of his innocence, in consequence of an occurrence equally accidental. These two ladies, the only two persons in the universe whom it was of any consequence to him to meet, are captured in their voyage from Holy Isle, and brought to Edinburgh, by the luckiest accident in the world, the very day that De Wilton and Marmion make their entry into it. Nay, the king, without knowing that they at all of his acquaintance, happens to appoint them lodgings in the same staircase, and to make them travel under his escort! We pass the night-combat at Gifford, in which Marmion knows his opponent by moonlight, though he never could guess at him in sunshine; and all the inconsistencies of his dilatory wooing of Lady Clare. Those, and all the prodigies and miracles of the story, we can excuse, as within the privilege of poetry; but the lucky chances we have already specified, are rather too much for our patience. A poet, we think, should never let his heroes contract such great debts to fortune; especially when a little exertion of his own might make them independent of her bounty. De Wilton might have been made to seek and watch his adversary, from some moody feeling of patient revenge; and it certainly would not have been difficult to discover motives which might have induced both Clara and the Abbess to follow and relieve him, without dragging them into his presence by the clumsy hands of a cruiser from Dunbar.

In the *fourth* place, we think we have reason to complain of Mr. Scott for having made his figuring characters so entirely worthless, as to excite but little of our sympathy, and at the same time keeping his virtuous personages so completely in the back ground, that we are scarcely at all acquainted with them when the work is brought to a conclusion. Marmion is not only a villain, but a mean and sordid villain; and represented as such, without any visible motive, and at the evident expense of characteristic truth and consistency. His elopement with Constance, and his subsequent desertion of her, are knightly vices enough, we suppose; but then he would surely have been more interesting and natural, if he had deserted her for a brighter beauty, and not merely for a richer bride. This was very well for Mr. Thomas Inkle, the young merchant of London; but for the valiant, haughty, and liberal Lord Marmion of Fontenaye and Lutterward, we do think it was quite unsuitable. Thus, too, it was very chivalrous, and orderly, perhaps, for him to hate De Wilton, and to seek to supplant him in his lady's love; but to slip a bundle of forged letters into his bureau was cowardly as well as malignant. Now, Marmion is not represented as a coward, nor as at all afraid of De Wilton, on the contrary and it is certainly the most absurd part of the story, he fights him fairly and valiantly after all, and overcomes him by mere force of arms, as he might have done at the beginning, without having recourse to devices so unsuitable to his general character and habits of acting. By the way, we have great doubts whether a *convicted* traitor, like De Wilton, whose guilt was established by written evidence under his own hand, was ever allowed to enter the lists, as a knight, against his accuser. At all events, we are positive, that an accuser, who was as ready and willing to fight as Marmion, could never have condescended to forge in support of his accusation;

and that the author has greatly diminished our interest in the story, as well as needlessly violated the truth of character, by loading his hero with the guilt of this most revolting and improbable proceeding. The crimes of Constance are multiplied, in like manner, to such a degree as both to destroy our interest in her fate, and to violate all probability. Her elopement was enough to bring on her doom; and we should have felt more for it, if it had appeared a little more unmerited. She is utterly debased, when she becomes the instrument of Marmion's murderous perfidy, and the assassin of her unwilling rival.

De Wilton, again, is too much depressed throughout the poem. It is rather dangerous for a poet to choose a hero who has been beaten in fair battle. The readers of romance do not like an unsuccessful warrior; but to be beaten in a judicial combat, and to have his arms reversed, and tied on the gallows, is an adventure which can only be expiated by signal prowess and exemplary revenge, achieved against great odds, in full view of the reader. The unfortunate De Wilton, however, carries this stain upon him from one end of the poem to the other. He wanders up and down, a dishonoured fugitive, in the disguise of a palmer, through the first five books; and though he is knighted and mounted again in the last, yet we see nothing of his performances; nor is the author merciful enough to afford him one opportunity of redeeming his credit by an exploit of gallantry or skill. For the poor Lady Clare, she is a personage of still greater insipidity and insignificance. The author seems to have formed her upon the principle of Mr. Pope's maxim, that women have no characters at all. We find her every where, where she has no business to be; neither saying nor doing any thing of the least consequence, but whimpering and sobbing over the Matrimony in her prayer book, like a great miss from a boarding school; and all this is the more inexcusable, as she is altogether a supernumerary person in the play, who should atone for her intrusion by some brilliancy or novelty of deportment. Matters would have gone on just as well, although she had been left behind at Whitby, till after the battle of Flodden; and she is daggled about in the train, first of the Abbess, and then of Lord Marmion, for no purpose that we can see, but to afford the author an opportunity for two or three pages of indifferent description.

Finally, we must object, both on critical and on national grounds, to the discrepancy between the title and the substance of the poem, and the neglect of Scottish feelings and Scottish character that is manifested throughout. Marmion is no more a tale of Flodden Field, than of Bosworth Field, or any other field in history. The story is quite independent of the national feuds of the sister kingdoms; and the battle of Flodden has no other connection with it, than from being the conflict in which the hero loses his life. Flodden, however, is mentioned; and the preparations for Flodden, and the consequences of it, are repeatedly alluded to in the course of the composition. Yet we nowhere find any adequate expressions of those melancholy and patriotic sentiments which are still all over Scotland the accompaniment of those allusions and recollections. No picture is drawn of the national feelings before or after that fatal encounter; and the day that broke for ever the pride and the splendour of his country, is only commemorated by a Scottish poet as the period when an English warrior was beaten to the ground. There is scarcely one trait of true Scottish nationality or patriotism introduced into the whole poem; and Mr. Scott's only expression of admiration or love for the beautiful country to which he belongs, is put, if we rightly remember, into the

mouth of one of his Southern favourites. Independently of this, we think that too little pains is taken to distinguish the Scottish character and manners from the English, or to give expression to the general feeling of rivalry and mutual jealousy which at that time existed between the two countries.

If there be any truth in what we have now said, it is evident that the merit of this poem cannot consist in the story. And yet it has very great merit, and various kinds of merit, — both in the picturesque representation of visible objects, in the delineation of manners and characters, and in the description of great and striking events. †

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The powerful poetry of these passages can receive no illustration from any praises or observations of ours. It is superior, in our apprehension, to all that this author has hitherto produced; and, with a few faults of diction, equal to any thing that has *ever* been written upon similar subjects. From the moment the author gets in sight of Flodden Field, indeed, to the end of the poem, there is no tame writing, and no intervention of ordinary passages. He does not once flag or grow tedious; and neither stops to describe dresses and ceremonies, nor to commemorate the harsh names of feudal barons from the Border. There is a flight of five or six hundred lines, in short, in which he never stoops his wing, nor wavers in his course; but carries the reader forward with a more rapid, sustained, and lofty movement, than any epic bard that we can at present remember.

From the contemplation of such distinguished excellence, it is painful to be obliged to turn to the defects and deformities which occur in the same composition. But this, though a less pleasing, is a still more indispensable, part of our duty; and one, from the resolute discharge of which, much more beneficial consequences may be expected. In the work which contains the fine passages we have just quoted, and many of nearly equal beauty, there is such a proportion of tedious, hasty, and injudicious composition, as makes it questionable with us, whether it is entitled to go down to posterity as a work of classical merit, or whether the author will retain, with another generation, that high reputation which his genius certainly might make coeval with the language. These are the authors, after all, whose faults it is of most consequence to point out; and criticism performs her best and boldest office,— not when she tramples down the weed, or tears up the bramble, — but when she strips the strangling ivy from the oak, or cuts out the canker from the rose. The faults of the fable we have already noticed at sufficient length. Those of the execution we shall now endeavour to enumerate with greater brevity.

And in the *first* place, we must beg leave to protest, in the name of a very numerous class of readers, against the insufferable number, and length, and minuteness of those descriptions of ancient dresses, and manners, and buildings, and ceremonies, and local superstitions, with which the whole poem is overrun, — which render so many notes necessary, and are, after all, but imperfectly understood by those to whom chivalrous antiquity has not hitherto been an object of peculiar attention. We object to these, and to all such details, because they are, for the most part, without dignity or interest in themselves; because, in a modern

† Here follow specimens of the poem, which the reviewer has judiciously chosen. He prefers extracting those parts that are most enlivening and powerful. For this purpose he selects the opening stanzas of the poem, the first presentment of the mysterious Palmer, and the voyage of the Lady Abbess and her nuns.

author, they are evidently unnatural; and because they must always be strange, and, in a good degree, obscure and unintelligible, to ordinary readers.

When a great personage is to be introduced, it is right, perhaps, to give the reader some notion of his external appearance; and when a memorable event is to be narrated, it is natural to help the imagination by some picturesque representation of the scenes with which it is connected. Yet, even upon such occasions, it can seldom be advisable to present the reader with a full inventory of the hero's dress, from his shoebuckle to the plume in his cap, or to enumerate all the drawbridges, portcullises, and diamond-cut stones in the castle. Mr. Scott, however, not only draws out almost all his pictures in these full dimensions, but frequently introduces those pieces of Flemish or Chinese painting to represent persons who are of no consequence, or places and events which are of no importance to the story. It would be endless to go through the poem for examples of this excess of minute description; we shall merely glance at the first canto as a specimen. We pass the long description of Lord Marmion himself, with his mail of Milan steel; the blue ribands on his horse's mane; and his blue velvet housings. We pass also the two gallant squires who rode behind him. But our patience is really exhausted, when we are forced to attend to the black stockings and blue jerkins of the inferior persons in the train, and to the whole process of turning out the guard with advanced arms on entering the castle.†

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Now, we are really at a loss to know, why the mere circumstance of a moderate antiquity should be supposed so far to ennoble those details, as to entitle them to a place in poetry, which certainly never could be claimed for a description of more modern adventures. Nobody, we believe, would be bold enough to introduce into a serious poem a description of the hussar boots and gold epaulettes of a commander-in-chief, and much less to particularise the liveries and canes of his servants, or the order and array of a grand dinner, given even to the cabinet ministers. Yet these things are, in their own nature, fully as picturesque, and as interesting, as the ribands at the mane of Lord Marmion's horse, or his supper and breakfast at the castle of Norham. We are glad, indeed, to find these little details in *old* books, whether in prose or verse, because they are there authentic and valuable documents of the usages and modes of life of our ancestors; and we are thankful when we light upon this sort of information in an ancient romance, which commonly contains matter much more tedious. Even there, however, we smile at the simplicity which could mistake such naked enumerations for poetical description; and reckon them as nearly on a level, in point of taste, with the theological disputations that are sometimes introduced in the same meritorious compositions. In a *modern* romance, however, these details, being no longer authentic, are of no value in point of information; and as the author has no claim to indulgence on the ground of simplicity, the smile which his predecessors excited is in some danger of being turned into a yawn. If he wishes sincerely to follow their example, he should describe the manners of his own time, and not of theirs. They painted from observation, and not from study; and the familiarity and *naïveté* of their delineations, transcribed with a slovenly and hasty hand from what

† The critic quotes a few stanzas in which the blemishes he has so clearly pointed out are most conspicuously displayed.

they saw daily before them, is as remote as possible from the elaborate pictures extracted by a modern imitator from black-letter books, and coloured, not from the life, but from learned theories, or at best from mouldy, monkish illuminations, and mutilated fragments of painted glass.

But the times of chivalry, it may be said, were more picturesque than the present times. They are better adapted to poetry; and every thing that is associated with them has a certain hold on the imagination, and partakes of the interest of the period. We do not mean utterly to deny this; nor can we stop, at present, to assign exact limits to our assent; but this we will venture to observe, in general, that if it be true that the interest which we take in the contemplation of the chivalrous era, arises from the dangers and virtues by which it was distinguished, — from the constant hazards in which its warriors passed their days, and the mild and generous valour with which they met those hazards, — joined to the singular contrast which it presented between the ceremonious polish and gallantry of the nobles, and the brutish ignorance of the body of the people: — if these are, as we conceive they are, the sources of the charm which still operates in behalf of the days of knightly adventure, then it should follow, that nothing should interest us, by association with that age, but what serves naturally to bring before us those hazards and that valour, and gallantry, and aristocratical superiority. Any description or any imitation of the exploits in which those qualities were signalised will do this most effectually. Battles, tournaments, penances, deliverance of damsels, — instalments of knights, &c.; and, intermixed with these, we must admit some description of arms, armorial bearings, castles, battlements, and chapels: but the least and lowest of the whole certainly is the description of servants' liveries, and of the peaceful operations of eating, drinking, and ordinary salutation. These have no sensible connection with the qualities or peculiarities which have conferred certain poetical privileges on the manners of chivalry. They do not enter either necessarily or naturally into our conception of what is interesting in those manners; and, though protected, by their strangeness, from the ridicule which would infallibly attach to their modern equivalents, are substantially as unpoetic, and as little entitled to indulgence from impartial criticism.

We would extend this censure to a larger proportion of the work before us than we now choose to mention, certainly to all the stupid monkish legends about St. Hilda and St. Cuthbert, to the ludicrous description of Lord Gifford's habiliments of divination, and to all the various scraps and fragments of antiquarian history and baronial biography, which are scattered profusely through the whole narrative. These we conceive to be put in purely for the sake of displaying the erudition of the author; and poetry, which has no other recommendation, but that the substance of it has been gleaned from rare or obscure books, has, in our estimation, the least of all possible recommendations. Mr. Scott's great talents, and the novelty of the style in which his romances are written, have made even these defects acceptable to a considerable part of his readers. His genius, seconded by the omnipotence of fashion, has brought chivalry again into temporary favour; but he ought to know, that this is a taste too evidently unnatural to be long prevalent in the modern world Fine ladies and gentlemen now talk, indeed, of donjons, keeps, tabards, scutcheons, tressures, caps of maintenance, portcullises, wimples, and we know not what besides; just as they did, in the days of Dr. Darwin's popularity, of gnomes, sylphs, oxygen, gossamer, polygynia, and polyandria.

That fashion, however, passed rapidly away; and if it be now evident to all the world, that Dr. Darwin obstructed the extension of his fame, and hastened the extinction of his brilliant reputation, by the pedantry and ostentatious learning of his poems, Mr. Scott should take care that a different sort of pedantry does not produce the same effects. The world will never be long pleased with what it does not readily understand; and the poetry which is destined for immortality, should treat only of feelings and events which can be conceived and entered into by readers of all descriptions.

What we have now mentioned is the cardinal fault of the work before us; but it has other faults, of too great magnitude to be passed altogether without notice. There is a debasing lowness and vulgarity in some passages, which we think must be offensive to every reader of delicacy, and which are not, for the most part, redeemed by any vigour or picturesque effect.†

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There are many other blemishes, both of taste and of diction, which we had marked for reprehension, but now think it unnecessary to specify; and which, with some of those we have mentioned, we are willing to ascribe to the haste in which much of the poem seems evidently to have been composed. Mr. Scott knows too well what is due to the public, to make any boast of the rapidity with which his works are written; but the dates and the extent of his successive publications show sufficiently how short a time could be devoted to each; and explain, though they do not apologise for, the many imperfections with which they have been suffered to appear. He who writes for immortality should not be sparing of time; and if it be true, that in every thing which has a principle of life, the period of gestation and growth bears some proportion to that of the whole future existence, the author now before us should tremble when he looks back on the miracles of his own facility.

We have dwelt longer on the beauties and defects of this poem, than we are afraid will be agreeable either to the partial or the indifferent; not only because we look upon it as a misapplication, in some degree, of very extraordinary talents, but because we cannot help considering it as the foundation of a new school, which may hereafter occasion no little annoyance both to us and to the public. Mr. Scott has hitherto filled the whole stage himself; and the very splendour of his success has probably operated, as yet, rather to deter, than to encourage, the herd of rivals and imitators: but if, by the help of the good parts of his poem, he succeeds in suborning the verdict of the public in favour of the bad parts also, and establishes an indiscriminate taste for chivalrous legends and romances in irregular rhyme, he may depend upon having as many copyists as Mrs. Radcliffe or Schiller, and upon becoming the founder of a new schism in the catholic poetical church, for which, in spite of all our exertions, there will probably be no cure, but in the extravagance of the last and lowest of its followers. It is for this reason that we conceive it to be our duty to make one strong effort to bring back the great apostle of the heresy to the wholesome creed of his instructors, and to stop the insurrection before it becomes desperate and senseless, by persuading the leader to return to his duty and allegiance. We admire Mr. Scott's

† In justification of this harsh censure, several passages are quoted. Amongst others, the commemoration of Sir Hugh Heron's troopers, the account of Friar John, the speeches of Squire Blount, and the Abbess's explanation to De Wilton.

genius as much as any of those who may be misled by its perversion; and, like the curate and the barber in Don Quixote, lament the day when a gentleman of such endowments was corrupted by the wicked tales of knight-errantry and enchantment.

We have left ourselves no room to say any thing of the epistolary effusions which are prefixed to each of the cantos. They certainly are not among the happiest productions of Mr. Scott's muse. They want interest in the subjects, and finish in the execution. There is too much of them about the personal and private feelings and affairs of the author; and too much of the remainder about the most trite commonplaces of politics and poetry. There is a good deal of spirit, however, and a good deal of nature intermingled. There is a fine description of St. Mary's Loch in that prefixed to the second canto; and a very pleasing representation of the author's early tastes and prejudices, in that prefixed to the third. The last, which is about Christmas, is the worst; though the first, containing a threnody on Nelson, Pitt, and Fox, exhibits a more remarkable failure. We are unwilling to quarrel with a poet on the score of politics; but the manner in which he has chosen to praise the last of those great men, is more likely, we conceive, to give offence to his admirers, than the most direct censure. The only deed for which he is praised is, for having broken off the negotiation for peace; and for this act of firmness, it is added, Heaven rewarded him with a share in the honoured grave of Pitt! It is then said, that his errors should be forgotten, and that he *died* a Briton — a pretty plain insinuation, that, in the author's opinion, he did not live one; and just such an encomium, as he himself pronounces over the grave of his villain hero Marmion. There was no need, surely, to pay compliments to ministers or princesses, either in the introduction or in the body of a romance of the sixteenth century. Yet we have a laboured lamentation over the Duke of Brunswick, in one of the epistles; and, in the heart of the poem, a triumphant allusion to the siege of Copenhagen — the last exploit, certainly, of British valour, on which we should have expected a chivalrous poet to found his patriotic gratulations. We have no business, however, on this occasion, with the political creed of the author; and we notice these allusions to objects of temporary interest, chiefly as instances of bad taste, and additional proofs that the author does not always recollect, that a poet should address himself to more than one generation.

MANFRED.*

This is a very strange — not a very pleasing — but unquestionably a very powerful and most poetical production. The noble author, we find, still deals with that dark and overawing Spirit by whose aid he has so often subdued the minds of his readers, and in whose might he has wrought so many wonders. In Manfred, we recognise at once the gloom and potency of that soul which burned and blasted and fed upon itself in Harold, and Conrad, and Lara — and which comes again in this piece, more in sorrow than in anger — more proud, perhaps, and more awful

* Manfred. A Dramatic Poem. By Lord Byron. — Vol. xxviii. p. 418. August, 1817.

than ever — but with the fiercer traits of its misanthropy subdued, as it were, and quenched in the gloom of a deeper despondency. Manfred does not, like Conrad and Lara, wreak the anguish of his burning heart in the dangers and daring of desperate and predatory war — nor seek to drown bitter thoughts in the tumult of perpetual contention — nor yet, like Harold, does he sweep over the peopled scenes of the earth with high disdain and aversion, and make his survey of the business and pleasures and studies of man, an occasion for taunts and sarcasms, and the food of an unmeasurable spleen. He is fixed by the genius of the poet in the majestic solitudes of the central Alps — where from his youth up, he has lived in proud but calm seclusion from the ways of men, conversing only with the magnificent forms and aspects of nature by which he is surrounded, and with the Spirits of the Elements, over whom he has acquired dominion, by the secret and unhallowed studies of Sorcery and Magic. He is averse indeed from mankind, and scorns the low and frivolous nature to which he belongs; but he cherishes no animosity or hostility to that feeble race. Their concerns excite no interest — their pursuits no sympathy — their joys no envy. It is irksome and vexatious for him to be crossed by them in his melancholy musings, — but he treats them with gentleness and pity; and, except when stung to impatience by too importunate an intrusion, is kind and considerate of the comforts of all around him.

This piece is properly entitled a dramatic poem — for it is merely poetical, and is not at all a drama or play, in the modern acceptation of the term. It has no action; no plot — and no characters; Manfred merely muses and suffers from the beginning to the end. His distresses are the same at the opening of the scene and at its closing — and the temper in which they are borne is the same. A hunter and a priest, and some domestics, are indeed introduced; but they have no connection with the passions or sufferings on which the interest depends; and Manfred is substantially alone throughout the whole piece. He holds no communion but with the memory of the being he had loved; and the immortal Spirits whom he evokes to reproach with his misery, and their inability to relieve it. These unearthly beings approach nearer to the character of persons of the drama — but still they are but choral accompaniments to the performance; and Manfred is, in reality, the only actor and sufferer on the scene. To delineate his character, indeed — to render conceivable his feelings — is plainly the whole scope and design of the poem; and the conception and execution are, in this respect, equally admirable. It is a grand and terrific vision of a being invested with superhuman attributes, in order that he may be capable of more than human sufferings, and be sustained under them by more than human force and pride. To object to the improbability of the fiction is, we think, to mistake the end and aim of the author. Probabilities, we apprehend, did not enter at all into his consideration — his object was, to produce effect — to exalt and dilate the character through whom he was to interest or appal us — and to raise our conception of it, by all the helps that could be derived from the majesty of nature, or the dread of superstition. It is enough, therefore, if the situation in which he has placed him is *conceivable* — and if the supposition of its reality enhances our emotions and kindles our imagination; — for it is Manfred only that we are required to fear, to pity, or admire. If we can once conceive of him as a real existence, and enter into the depth and the height of his pride and his sorrows, we may deal as we please with the means that have been

used to furnish us with this impression, or to enable us to attain to this conception. We may regard them but as types, or metaphors, or allegories: but *he* is the thing to be expressed, and the feeling and the intellect of which all these are but shadows.

The events, such as they are, upon which the piece may be said to turn, have all taken place long before its opening, and are but dimly shadowed out in the casual communications of the agonising being to whom they relate. Nobly born, and trained in the castle of his ancestors, he had very soon sequestered himself from the society of men; and, after running through the common circle of human sciences, had dedicated himself to the worship of the wild magnificence of nature, and to those forbidden studies by which he had learned to command its presiding powers. One companion, however, he had, in all his tasks and enjoyments — a female of kindred genius, taste, and capacity — lovely, too, beyond all loveliness: but, as we gather, too nearly related to be lawfully beloved. The catastrophe of their unhappy passions is insinuated in the darkest and most ambiguous terms — all that we make out is, that she died untimely and by violence, on account of this fatal attachment — though not by the act of its object. He killed her, he says, not with his hand — but his heart; and her blood was shed, though not by him. From that hour, life is a burden to him, and memory a torture — and the extent of his power and knowledge serves only to show him the hopelessness and endlessness of his misery.

The piece opens with his evocation of the Spirits of the Elements, from whom he demands the boon of forgetfulness — and questions them as to his own immortality. The scene is in his Gothic tower at midnight — and opens with a soliloquy that reveals at once the state of the speaker, and the genius of the author: —

> " The lamp must be replenish'd — but even then
> It will not burn so long as I must watch:
> Philosophy and science, and the springs
> Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world,
> I have essay'd, and in my mind there is
> A power to make these subject to itself —
> But they avail not: I have done men good,
> And I have met with good even among men —
> But this avail'd not: I have had my foes,
> And none have baffled, many fallen before me —
> But this avail'd not: — Good, or evil, life,
> Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
> Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
> Since that all-nameless hour. I have no dread,
> And feel the curse to have no natural fear,
> Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes,
> Or lurking love of something on the earth. —
> Now to my task." P. 7, 8.

When his evocation is completed, a star is seen at the far end of a gallery, and celestial voices are heard reciting a great deal of poetry. After they have answered that the gift of oblivion is not at their disposal, and intimated that death itself could not bestow it on him, they ask if he has any further demand to make of them. He answers —

> " No, none: yet stay — one moment, ere we part —
> I would behold ye face to face. I hear
> Your voices, sweet and melancholy sounds,
> As music on the waters; and I see

The steady aspect of a clear large star;
But nothing more. Approach me as ye are,
Or one, or all, in your accustom'd forms.
SPIRIT. We have no forms beyond the elements
Of which we are the mind and principle:
But choose a form — in that we will appear.
MAN. I have no choice; there is no form on earth
Hideous or beautiful to me. Let him,
Who is most powerful of ye, take such aspect
As unto him may seem most fitting. — Come!
SEVENTH SPIRIT. (*Appearing in the shape of a beautiful female figure.*) Behold!
MAN. Oh God! if it be thus, and *thou*
Art not a madness and a mockery,
I yet might be most happy. — I will clasp thee,
And we again will be —— [*The figure vanishes.*
My heart is crush'd!
[MANFRED *falls senseless.*" P. 15, 16.

The first scene of this extraordinary performance ends with a long poetical incantation, sung by the invisible spirits over the senseless victim before them. The second shows him in the bright sunshine of morning, on the top of the Jungfrau mountain, meditating self-destruction — and uttering forth in solitude as usual the voice of his habitual despair, and those intermingled feelings of love and admiration for the grand and beautiful objects with which he is environed, that unconsciously win him back to a certain kindly sympathy with human enjoyments.

" MAN. The spirits I have raised abandon me —
The spells which I have studied baffle me —
The remedy I reck'd of tortured me:
I lean no more on superhuman aid,
It hath no power upon the past, and for
The future, till the past be gulf'd in darkness,
It is not of my search. — My mother Earth!
And thou fresh breaking Day, and you, ye Mountains,
Why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye.
And thou, the bright eye of the universe,
That openest over all, and unto all
Art a delight — thou shin'st not on my heart.
And you, ye crags, upon whose extreme edge
I stand, and on the torrent's brink beneath
Behold the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs
In dizziness of distance; when a leap,
A stir, a motion, even a breath, would bring
My breast upon its rocky bosom's bed
To rest for ever — wherefore do I pause?
—— Ay,
Thou winged and cloud-cleaving minister, [*An eagle passes.*
Whose happy flight is highest into heaven,
Well may'st thou swoop so near me — I should be
Thy prey, and gorge thine eaglets; thou art gone
Where the eye cannot follow thee; but thine
Yet pierces downward, onward, or above
With a pervading vision. — Beautiful!
How beautiful is all this visible world!
How glorious in its action and itself;
But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we,
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe

The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will
Till our mortality predominates,
And men are — what they name not to themselves,
And trust not to each other. Hark! the note,
[*The shepherd's pipe in the distance is heard.*
The natural music of the mountain reed —
For here the patriarchal days are not
A pastoral fable — pipes in the liberal air,
Mix'd with the sweet bells of the sauntering herd;
My soul would drink those echoes. — Oh, that I were
The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,
A living voice, a breathing harmony,
A bodiless enjoyment — born and dying
With the blest tone which made me!" P. 20—22.

At this period of his soliloquy, he is descried by a chamois hunter, who overhears its continuance: —

" To be thus —
Grey-hair'd with anguish, like these blasted pines,
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,
A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,
Which but supplies a feeling to decay —
And to be thus, eternally but thus,
Having been otherwise!
Ye toppling crags of ice!
Ye avalanches, whom a breath draws down
In mountainous o'erwhelming, come and crush me!
I hear ye momently above, beneath,
Crash with a frequent conflict; but ye pass,
And only fall on things which still would live;
On the young flourishing forest, or the hut
And hamlet of the harmless villager.
The mists boil up around the glaciers! clouds
Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury,
Like foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell,
Whose every wave breaks on a living shore,
Heap'd with the damn'd like pebbles. — I am giddy!" P. 23, 24.

— Just as he is about to spring from the cliff, he is seized by the hunter, who forces him away from the dangerous place in the midst of the rising tempest. In the second act, we find him in the cottage of this peasant, and in a still wilder state of disorder. His host offers him wine; but, upon looking at the cup, he exclaims —

" Away, away! there's blood upon the brim!
Will it then never — never sink in the earth?
C. Hun. What dost thou mean? thy senses wander from thee.
Man. I say 'tis blood — my blood! the pure warm stream
Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
And loved each other as we should not love —
And this was shed: but still it rises up,
Colouring the clouds, that shut me out from heaven,
Where thou art not — and I shall never be.
C. Hun. Man of strange words, and some half-maddening sin," &c.
" Man. Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?
It doth; but actions are our epochs: mine
Have made my days and nights imperishable,
Endless, and all alike, as sands upon the shore,

Innumerable atoms; and one desert,
Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,
But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,
Rocks, and the salt-surf weeds of bitterness.
C. HUN. Alas! he's mad — but yet I must not leave him.
MAN. I would I were — for then the things I see
Would be but a distemper'd dream.
C. HUN. What is it
That thou dost see, or think thou look'st upon?
MAN. Myself, and thee — a peasant of the Alps —
Thy humble virtues, hospitable home,
And spirit patient, pious, proud, and free;
Thy self-respect, grafted on innocent thoughts;
Thy days of health, and nights of sleep; thy toils,
By danger dignified, yet guiltless; hopes
Of cheerful old age and a quiet grave,
With cross and garland over its green turf,
And thy grandchildren's love for epitaph;
This do I see — and then I look within —
It matters not — my soul was scorch'd already!" P. 27—29.

The following scene is one of the most poetical and most sweetly written in the poem. There is a still and delicious witchery in the tranquillity and seclusion of the place, and the celestial beauty of the Being who reveals herself in the midst of these visible enchantments. In a deep valley among the mountains, Manfred appears alone before a lofty cataract, pealing in the quiet sunshine down the still and everlasting rocks; and says —

" It is not noon — the sunbow's rays still arch
The torrent with the many hues of heaven,
And roll the sheeted silver's waving column
O'er the crag's headlong perpendicular,
And fling its lines of foaming light along,
And to and fro, like the pale courser's tail,
The Giant steed, to be bestrode by Death,
As told in the Apocalypse. No eyes
But mine now drink this sight of loveliness;
I should be sole in this sweet solitude,
And with the Spirit of the place divide
The homage of these waters. — I will call her.
[*He takes some of the water into the palm of his hand, and flings it in the air, muttering the adjuration. After a pause, the* WITCH OF THE ALPS *rises beneath the arch of the sunbow of the torrent.*
MAN. Beautiful Spirit! with thy hair of light,
And dazzling eyes of glory, in whose form
The charms of Earth's least-mortal daughters grow
To an unearthly stature, in an essence
Of purer elements; while the hues of youth, —
Carnation'd like a sleeping infant's cheek,
Rock'd by the beating of her mother's heart,
Or the rose tints, which summer's twilight leaves
Upon the lofty glacier's virgin snow,
The blush of earth embracing with her heaven, —
Tinge thy celestial aspect, and make tame
The beauties of the sunbow which bends o'er thee.
Beautiful Spirit! in thy calm clear brow,
Wherein is glass'd serenity of soul,
Which of itself shows immortality,
I read that thou wilt pardon to a Son
Of Earth, whom the abstruser Powers permit

At times to commune with them — if that he
Avail him of hs spells — to call thee thus,
And gaze on thee a moment.
WITCH. Son of Earth!
I know thee, and the Powers which give thee power;
I know thee for a man of many thoughts,
And deeds of good and ill, extreme in both,
Fatal and fated in thy sufferings.
I have expected this — what wouldst thou with me?
MAN. To look upon thy beauty — nothing further." P. 31, 32.

There is something exquisitely beautiful, to our taste, in all this passage; and both the apparition and the dialogue are so managed, that the sense of their improbability is swallowed up in that of their beauty; — and, without actually believing that such spirits exist or communicate themselves, we feel for the moment as if we stood in their presence. What follows, though extremely powerful, and more laboured in the writing, has less charm for us. He tells his celestial auditor the brief story of his misfortune; and when he mentions the death of the only being he had ever loved, the beauteous Spirit breaks in with her superhuman pride: —

" And for this —
A being of the race thou dost despise,
The order which thine own would rise above,
Mingling with us and ours, thou dost forego
The gifts of our great knowledge, and shrink'st back
To recreant mortality —— Away!
MAN. Daughter of Air! I tell thee, since that hour —
But words are breath — look on me in my sleep,
Or watch my watchings — Come and sit by me!
My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies; — I have gnash'd
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset; — I have pray'd
For madness as a blessing — 'tis denied me.
I have affronted Death — but in the war
Of elements the waters shrunk from me,
And fatal things pass'd harmless." P. 36, 37.

The third scene is the boldest in the exhibition of supernatural persons. The three Destinies and Nemesis meet at midnight, on the top of the Alps, on their way to the hall of Arimanes, and sing strange ditties to the moon, of their mischiefs wrought among men. Nemesis, being rather late, thus apologises for keeping them waiting: —

" I was detain'd repairing shatter'd thrones,
Marrying fools, restoring dynasties,
Avenging men upon their enemies,
And making them repent their own revenge;
Goading the wise to madness; from the dull
Shaping out oracles to rule the world
Afresh, for they were waxing out of date,
And mortals dared to ponder for themselves,
To weigh kings in the balance, and to speak
Of freedom, the forbidden fruit. — Away!
We have outstaid the hour — mount we our clouds!" P. 44.

This we think is out of place at least, if we must not say out of character; and though the author may tell us that human calamities are naturally subjects of derision to the Ministers of Vengeance, yet we can-

not be persuaded that satirical and political allusions are at all compatible with the feelings and impressions which it was here his business to maintain. When the Fatal Sisters are again assembled before the throne of Arimanes, Manfred suddenly appears among them, and refuses the prostrations which they require. The First Destiny thus loftily announces him: —

> " Prince of the Powers invisible! This man
> Is of no common order, as his port
> And presence here denote; his sufferings
> Have been of an immortal nature, like
> Our own; his knowledge and his powers and will,
> As far as is compatible with clay,
> Which clogs the ethereal essence, have been such
> As clay hath seldom borne; his aspirations
> Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth,
> And they have only taught him what we know —
> That knowledge is not happiness, and science
> But an exchange of ignorance for that
> Which is another kind of ignorance.
> This is not all; — the passions, attributes
> Of earth and heaven, from which no power, nor being,
> Nor breath from the worm upwards is exempt,
> Have pierced his heart; and in their consequence
> Made him a thing, which I, who pity not,
> Yet pardon those who pity. He is mine,
> And thine, it may be — be it so, or not,
> No other Spirit in this region hath
> A soul like his — or power upon his soul." P. 47, 48.

At his desire, the ghost of his beloved Astarte is then called up, and appears — but refuses to speak at the command of the powers who have raised her, till Manfred breaks out into this passionate and agonising address: —

> " Hear me, hear me —
> Astarte! my beloved! speak to me:
> I have so much endured — so much endure —
> Look on me! the grave hath not changed thee more
> Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me
> Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made
> To torture thus each other, though it were
> The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.
> Say that thou loath'st me not — that I do bear
> This punishment for both — that thou wilt be
> One of the blessed — and that I shall die,
> For hitherto all hateful things conspire
> To bind me in existence — in a life
> Which makes me shrink from immortality —
> A future like the past. I cannot rest.
> I know not what I ask, nor what I seek:
> I feel but what thou art — and what I am;
> And I would hear yet once, before I perish,
> The voice which was my music — Speak to me!
> For I have call'd on thee in the still night,
> Startled the slumbering birds from the hush'd boughs,
> And woke the mountain wolves, and made the caves
> Acquainted with thy vainly echoed name,
> Which answer'd me — many things answer'd me —
> Spirits and men — but thou wert silent all.
> Yet speak to me! I have outwatch'd the stars,
> And gazed o'er heaven in vain in search of thee.

Speak to me! I have wander'd o'er the earth
And never found thy likeness — Speak to me!
Look on the fiends around — they feel for me:
I fear them not, and feel for thee alone —
Speak to me! though it be in wrath; — but say —
I reck not what — but let me hear thee once —
This once — once more!
PHANTOM OF ASTARTE. Manfred!
MAN. Say on, say on —
I live but in the sound — it is thy voice!
PHAN. Manfred! To-morrow ends thine earthly ills.
Farewell!
MAN. Yet one word more — am I forgiven?
PHAN. Farewell!
MAN. Say, shall we meet again?
PHAN. Farewell!
MAN. One word for mercy! Say, thou lovest me.
PHAN. Manfred! [*The Spirit of* ASTARTE *disappears.*
NEM. She's gone, and will not be recall'd." P. 50—52.

The last act, though in many passages very beautifully written, seems to us less powerful. It passes altogether in Manfred's castle, and is chiefly occupied in two long conversations between him and a holy abbot, who comes to exhort and absolve him, and whose counsel he repels with the most reverent gentleness, and but few bursts of dignity and pride. The following passages are full of poetry and feeling: —

" Ay — father! I have had those earthly visions
And noble aspirations in my youth,
To make my own the mind of other men,
The enlightener of nations; and to rise
I knew not whither — it might be to fall;
But fall, even as the mountain-cataract,
Which having leapt from its more dazzling height,
Even in the foaming strength of its abyss,
(Which casts up misty columns that become
Clouds raining from the re-ascended skies),
Lies low but mighty still. — But this is past,
My thoughts mistook themselves.
ABBOT. And why not live and act with other men?
MAN. Because my nature was averse from life;
And yet not cruel; for I would not make,
But find a desolation: — like the wind,
The red-hot breath of the most lone Simoom,
Which dwells but in the desert, and sweeps o'er
The barren sands which bear no shrubs to blast,
And revels o'er their wild and arid waves,
And seeketh not, so that it is not sought,
But being met is deadly; such hath been
The course of my existence; but there came
Things in my path which are no more." P. 59, 60.

There is also a fine address to the setting sun — and a singular miscellaneous soliloquy, in which one of the author's Roman recollections is brought in, we must say, somewhat unnaturally: —

" The stars are forth, the moon above the tops
Of the snow-shining mountains. — Beautiful!
I linger yet with Nature, for the Night
Hath been to me a more familiar face
Than that of man; and in her starry shade

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I linger yet with Nature, for the Night
Hath been to me a more familiar face
Than that of man; and in her starry shade

Of dim and solitary loveliness,
I learn'd the language of another world.
I do remember me, that in my youth,
When I was wandering, — upon such a night
I stood within the Coliseum's wall,
'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome:
The trees which grew along the broken arches
Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars
Shone through the rents of ruin; from afar
The watchdog bay'd beyond the Tiber; and
More near from out the Cæsars' palace came
The owl's long cry, and, interruptedly,
Of distant sentinels the fitful song
Begun and died upon the gentle wind.
Some cypresses beyond the time-worn breach
Appear'd to skirt the horizon, yet they stood
Within a bowshot. —
And thou didst shine, thou rolling Moon, upon
All this, and cast a wide and tender light,
Which soften'd down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation, and fill'd up,
As 'twere, anew, the gaps of centuries;
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not, till the place
Became religion, and the heart ran o'er
With silent worship of the great of old!" P. 68, 69.

In his dying hour he is beset with Demons, who pretend to claim him as their forfeit: — but he indignantly and victoriously disputes their claim, and asserts his freedom from their thraldrom.

" Must crimes be punish'd but by other crimes,
And greater criminals? — Back to thy hell!
Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;
Thou never shalt possess me, *that* I know:
What I have done is done; I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine:
The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or ill — derives
No colour from the fleeting things without;
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey —
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter. — Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me — but not yours!
[*The Demons disappear.*" P. 74, 75.

There are great faults, it must be admitted, in this poem; — but it is undoubtedly a work of genius and originality. Its worst fault, perhaps, is, that it fatigues and overawes us by the uniformity of its terror and solemnity. Another is the painful and offensive nature of the circumstance on which its distress is ultimately founded. It all springs from the disappointment or fatal issue of an incestuous passion; and incest, according to our modern ideas — for it was otherwise in antiquity — is not a thing to be at all brought before the imagination. The lyrical songs of the Spirits are too long, and not all excellent. There is something of pedantry in them now and then; and even Manfred deals in classical allusions a little too much. If we were to consider it as a

proper drama, or even as a finished poem, we should be obliged to add, that it is far too indistinct and unsatisfactory. But this we take to be according to the design and conception of the author. He contemplated but a dim and magnificent sketch of a subject which did not admit of more accurate drawing, or more brilliant colouring. Its obscurity is a part of its grandeur; — and the darkness that rests upon it, and the smoky distance in which it is lost, are all devices to increase its majesty, to stimulate our curiosity, and to impress us with deeper awe.

It is suggested, in an ingenious paper in a late Number of the Edinburgh Magazine, that the general conception of this piece, and much of what is excellent in the manner of its execution, have been borrowed from " the Tragical History of Dr. Faustus " of Marlow; and a variety of passages are quoted, which the author considers as similar, and, in many respects, superior to others in the poem before us. We cannot agree in the general terms of this conclusion; — but there is, no doubt, a certain resemblance, both in some of the topics that are suggested, and in the cast of the diction in which they are expressed. Thus, to induce Faustus to persist in his unlawful studies, he is told that the Spirits of the Elements will serve him —

> " Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,
> Shadowing more beauty in their ayrie browes
> Than have the white breasts of the Queene of Love."

And again, when the amorous sorcerer commands Helen of Troy to revive again to be his paramour, he addresses her, on her first appearance, in these rapturous lines —

> " Was this the face that launcht a thousand ships,
> And burn'd the toplesse towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen! make me immortal with a kiss!
> Her lips sucke forth my soule! — see where it flies!
> Come, Helen, come give me my soule againe.
> Here will I dwell, for heaven is in that lip,
> And all is dross that is not Helena.
> O! thou art fairer than the evening ayre,
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand starres;
> More lovely than the monarch of the skyes
> In wanton Arethusa's azure arms! "

The catastrophe, too, is bewailed in verses of great elegance and classical beauty: —

> " Cut is the branch that might have growne full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
> That sometime grew within this learned man.
> Faustus is gone! — regard his hellish fall,
> Whose fiendful torture may exhort the wise,
> Only to wonder at unlawful things."

But these, and many other smooth and fanciful verses in this curious old drama, prove nothing, we think, against the originality of Manfred; for there is nothing to be found there of the pride, the abstraction, and the heart-rooted misery in which that originality consists. Faustus is a vulgar sorcerer, tempted to sell his soul to the Devil for the ordinary price of sensual pleasure, and earthly power and glory—and who shrinks and shudders in agony when the forfeit comes to be exacted. The style, too, of Marlow, though elegant and scholarlike, is weak and childish compared with the depth and force of much of what we have quoted from Lord Byron; and the disgusting buffoonery and low farce of which

his piece is principally made up, place it much more in contrast, than in any terms of comparison, with that of his noble successor. In the tone and pitch of the composition, as well as in the character of the diction in the more solemn parts, the piece before us reminds us much more of the Prometheus of Æschylus, than of any more modern performance. The tremendous solitude of the principal person — the supernatural beings with whom alone he holds communion — the guilt — the firmness — the misery — are all points of resemblance to which the grandeur of the poetic imagery only gives a more striking effect. The chief differences are, that the subject of the Greek poet was sanctified and exalted by the established belief of his country, and that his terrors are nowhere tempered with the sweetness which breathes from so many passages of his English rival.

LALLA ROOKH.*

THERE is a great deal of our recent poetry derived from the East; but this is the finest orientalism we have had yet. The land of the Sun has never shone out so brightly on the children of the North — nor the sweets of Asia been poured forth, nor her gorgeousness displayed so profusely to the delighted senses of Europe. The beauteous forms, the dazzling splendours, the breathing odours of the East, seem at last to have found a kindred poet in that Green Isle of the West, whose Genius has long been suspected to be derived from a warmer clime, and now wantons and luxuriates in these voluptuous regions, as if it felt that it had at length regained its native element. It is amazing, indeed, how much at home Mr. Moore seems to be in India, Persia, and Arabia; and how purely and strictly Asiatic all the colouring and imagery of his book appears. He is thoroughly imbued with the character of the scenes to which he transports us; and yet the extent of his knowledge is less wonderful than the dexterity and apparent facility with which he has turned it to account in the elucidation and embellishment of his poetry. There is not a simile or description, a name, a trait of history or allusion of romance, which belongs to European experience; or does not indicate an entire familiarity with the life, nature, and learning of the East. Nor are these barbaric ornaments thinly scattered to make up a show. They are showered lavishly over all the work; and form, perhaps too much, the staple of the poetry — and the riches of that which is chiefly distinguished for its richness. We would confine this remark, however, to the descriptions of external objects, and the allusions to literature and history — to what may be termed the *matériel* of the poetry before us. The characters and sentiments are of a different order. They cannot, indeed, be said to be copies of European nature; but they are still less like that of any other region. They are, in truth, poetical imaginations; — but it is to the poetry of rational, honourable, considerate, and humane Europe, that they belong — and not to the childishness, cruelty, and profligacy of Asia. So far as we have yet seen, there is no sound sense, firmness of purpose, or principled goodness, except among the natives of Europe, and their genuine descendants.

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* Lalla Rookh, by Thomas Moore. — Vol. xxix. p. 1. November, 1817.

There is something very extraordinary, we think, in the work before us — and something which indicates in the author, not only a great exuberance of talent, but a very singular constitution of genius. While it is more splendid in imagery — and for the most part in very good taste — more rich in sparkling thoughts and original conceptions, and more full indeed of exquisite pictures, both of all sorts of beauties and virtues, and all sorts of sufferings and crimes, than any other poem that has yet come before us: we rather think we speak the sense of all classes of readers when we add, that the effect of the whole is to mingle a certain feeling of disappointment with that of admiration — to excite admiration rather than any warmer sentiment of delight — to dazzle, more than to enchant — and, in the end, more frequently to startle the fancy, and fatigue the attention, with the constant succession of glittering images and high-strained emotions, than to maintain a rising interest, or win a growing sympathy, by a less profuse or more systematic display of attractions.

The style is, on the whole, rather diffuse, and too unvaried in its character. But its greatest fault, in our eyes, is the uniformity of its brilliancy — the want of plainness, simplicity, and repose. We have heard it observed, by some very zealous admirers of Mr. Moore's genius, that you cannot open this book without finding a clustre of beauties in every page. Now, this is only another way of expressing what we think its greatest defect. No work, consisting of many pages, should have detached and distinguishable beauties in every one of them. No great work, indeed, should have *many* beauties: if it were perfect, it would have but *one*, and that but faintly perceptible, except on a view of the whole. Look, for example, at what is perhaps the most finished and exquisite production of human art — the design and elevation of a Grecian temple, in its old severe simplicity. What penury of ornament — what neglect of beauties of detail! — what masses of plain surface — what rigid economical limitation to the useful and the necessary! The cottage of a peasant is scarcely more simple in its structure, and has not fewer parts that are superfluous. Yet what grandeur — what elegance — what grace and completeness in the effect! The whole is beautiful — because the beauty is in the whole; but there is little merit in any of the parts, except that of fitness and careful finishing. Contrast this, now, with a Dutch pleasure-house, or a Chinese — where every part is meant to be beautiful, and the result is deformity, — where there is not an inch of the surface that is not brilliant with colour, and rough with curves and angles, — and where the effect of the whole is monstrous and offensive. We are as far as possible from meaning to insinuate that Mr. Moore's poetry is of this description; on the contrary, we think his ornaments are, for the most part, truly and exquisitely beautiful; and the general design of his pieces very elegant and ingenious: all that we mean to say is, that there is too much ornament — too many insulated and independent beauties — and that the notice and the very admiration they excite, hurt the interest of the general design; and not only withdraw our attention too importunately from it, but at last weary it out with their perpetual recurrence.

It seems to be a law of our intellectual constitution, that the powers of taste cannot be permanently gratified, except by some *sustained* or continuous emotion; and that a series, even of the most agreeable excitements, soon ceases, if broken and disconnected, to give any pleasure. No conversation fatigues so soon as that which is made up of points and epigrams; and the accomplished rhetorician, who —

——— could not ope
His mouth, but out there flew a trope,

must have been a most intolerable companion. There are some things, too, that seem so plainly intended for ornaments and seasonings only, that they are only agreeable, when sprinkled in moderation over a plainer medium. No one would like to make an entire meal on *sauce piquante;* or to appear in a coat crusted thick over with diamonds; or to pass a day in a steam of rich distilled perfumes. It is the same with the glittering ornaments of poetry — with splendid metaphors and ingenious allusions, and all the figures of speech and of thought that constitute its outward pomp and glory. Now, Mr. Moore, it appears to us, is decidedly too lavish of his gems and sweets; — he labours under a plethora of wit and imagination — impairs his credit by the palpable exuberance of his possessions, and would be richer with half his wealth. His works are not only of rich materials and graceful design, but they are every where glistening with small beauties and transitory inspirations — sudden flashes of fancy, that blaze out and perish; like earth-born meteors that crackle in the lower sky, and unseasonably divert our eyes from the great and lofty bodies which pursue their harmonious courses in a serener region.

We have spoken of these as faults of style, — but they could scarcely have existed without going deeper; and though they first strike us as qualities of the composition only, we find, upon a little reflection, that the same general character belongs to the fable, the characters, and the sentiments, — that they all sin alike in the excess of their means of attraction — and fail to interest, chiefly by being too interesting.

In order to avoid the debasement of ordinary or familiar life, the author has soared to a region beyond the comprehension of most of his readers. All his personages are so very beautiful, and brave, and agonising — so totally wrapt up in the exaltation of their vehement emotions, and withal so lofty in rank, and so sumptuous and magnificent in all that relates to their external condition, that the herd of ordinary mortals can scarcely venture to conceive of their proceedings, or to sympathise freely with their fortunes. The disasters to which they are exposed, and the designs in which they are engaged, are of the same ambitious and exaggerated character; and all are involved in so much pomp, and splendour, and luxury, and the description of their extreme grandeur and elegance forms so considerable a part of the whole work, that the less sublime portion of the species can with difficulty presume to judge of them, or to enter into the concernments of such very exquisite persons. The incidents, in like manner, are so prodigiously moving, so excessively improbable, and so terribly critical, that we have the same difficulty of raising our sentiments to the proper pitch for them; — and, finding it impossible to sympathise as we ought to do with such portentous occurrences, are sometimes tempted to withhold our sympathy altogether, and to seek for its objects among more familiar adventures. Scenes of voluptuous splendour and ecstasy alternate suddenly with agonising separations, atrocious crimes, and tremendous sufferings; — battles, incredibly fierce and sanguinary, follow close on entertainments incredibly sumptuous and elegant; — terrific tempests are succeeded by delicious calms at sea; and the land scenes are divided between horrible chasms and precipices, and vales and gardens rich in eternal blooms, and glittering with palaces and temples — while the interest of the story is maintained by instruments and agents of no less potency than insanity,

blasphemy, poisonings, religious hatred, national antipathy, demoniacal misanthropy, and devoted love.

We are aware that in objecting to a work like this, that it is made up of such materials, we may seem to be objecting that it is made of the elements of poetry, — since it is no doubt true, that it is by the use of these very materials that poetry is substantially distinguished from prose, and that it is to them it is indebted for all that is peculiar in the delight and interest it inspires: and it may seem a little unreasonable to complain of a poet, that he treats us with the essence of poetry. We have already hinted, however, that no man likes to live entirely on essences, and that our objection goes not only to the excessive strength of the emotions that are sought to be raised, but to the violence of their transitions, and the want of continuity in the train of feeling that is produced. It may not be amiss, however, to add a world or two more of explanation.

In the *first* place, then, if we consider how *the fact* stands, we shall find that all the great poets, and, in an especial manner, all the poets who chain down the attention of their readers, and maintain a growing interest through a long series of narrations, have been remarkable for the occasional familiarity, and even homeliness, of their incidents, characters, and sentiments. This is the distinguishing feature in Homer, Chaucer, Ariosto, Shakspeare, Dryden, Scott — and will be found to occur, we believe, in all poetry that has been long and extensively popular, or that is capable of pleasing very strongly, or stirring very deeply, the common sensibilities of our nature. We need scarcely make an exception for the lofty Lyric, which is so far from being generally attractive, that it is not even intelligible, except to a studious few — or for those solemn and devotional strains which derive their interest from a still higher principle; but in all narrative poetry — in all long pieces made up of descriptions and adventures, it seems hitherto to have been an indispensable condition of their success, that the persons and events should bear a considerable resemblance to those which we meet with in ordinary life; and, though more animated and important than to be of daily occurrence, should not be immeasurably exalted above the common standard of human fortune and character.

It should be almost enough to settle the question, that such is the fact — and that no narrative poetry has ever excited a great interest, where the persons were too much purified from the vulgar infirmities of our nature, or the incidents too thoroughly purged of all that is ordinary or familiar. But the slightest reflection upon the feelings with which we read such poetry, must satisfy us as *to the reason* of our disappointment. It may be told in two words. Writings of this kind revolt by their improbability; and fatigue, by offering no points upon which our sympathies can readily attach. — Two things are necessary to give a fictitious narrative a deep and commanding interest; *first*, that we should believe that such things might have happened; and, *secondly*, that they might have happened to ourselves, or to such persons as ourselves. But, in reading the ambitious and overwrought poetry of which we have been speaking, we feel perpetually, that there could have been no such people, and no such occurrences, as we are there called upon to feel for; and that it is impossible to have much concern about beings whose principles of action are so remote from our own, and who are placed in situations to which we have never known any parallel. It is no doubt true, that the stories that interest us must represent passions of a higher pitch, and events of a more extraordinary nature, than occur in ordinary life; and that it is in consequence of rising thus sensibly above its level, that they become objects of interest and attention. But, in order that

this very elevation may be felt, and produce its effect, the story must itself, in other places, give us the known and ordinary level, — and, by a thousand adaptations and traits of *universal* nature, make us feel that the characters which become every now and then the objects of our intense sympathy and admiration, in great emergencies, and under the influence of rare but conceivable excitements, are, after all, our fellow-creatures — made of the same flesh and blood with ourselves, and acting, and acted upon, by the common principles of our nature. Without this, indeed, the effect of their sufferings and exploits would be entirely lost upon us; as we should be without any scale by which to estimate the magnitude of the temptations they had to resist, or the energies they had exerted. To make us aware of the altitude of a mountain, it is absolutely necessary to show us the plain from which it ascends. If we are allowed to see nothing but *the table land* at the top, the effect will be no greater than if we had remained on the humble level of the shore — except that it will be more lonely, bleak, and inhospitable. And thus it is that, by exaggerating the heroic qualities of heroes, they become as uninteresting as if they had no such qualities — that by striking out those weaknesses and vulgar infirmities which identify them with ordinary mortals, they not only cease to interest ordinary mortals, but even to excite their admiration or surprise; and appear merely as strange inconceivable beings, in whom superhuman energy and refinement are no more to be wondered at, than the power of flying in an eagle, or of fasting in a snake.

The wise ancient who observed, that being a man himself, he could not but take an interest in every thing that related to man — might have confirmed his character for wisdom by adding, that, for the same reason, he could take no interest in any thing else. There is nothing, after all, that we ever truly care for, but the feelings of creatures like ourselves — and we are obliged to lend them to the flowers and the brooks of the valley, and the stars and airs of heaven, before we can take any delight in them. With sentient beings the case is more obviously the same. In whatever class we rank them, or with whatever fantastic attributes we may please to invest them, still we comprehend and concern ourselves about them, only in so far as they resemble ourselves. All the deities of the classic mythology — and all the devils and angels of later poets, are nothing but human creatures — or at least only interest us so long as they are so. Let any one try to imagine what kind of story he could make of the adventures of a set of beings who differed from our own species in any of its general attributes — who were incapable, for instance, of the debasing feelings of fear, pain, or anxiety — and he will find, that instead of becoming more imposing and attractive by getting rid of those infirmities, they become utterly insignificant, and indeed in a great degree inconceivable. Or, to come a little closer to the matter before us, and not to go beyond the bounds of common experience — suppose a tale, founded on refined notions of delicate love and punctilious integrity, to be told to a race of obscene, brutal, and plundering savages — or, even within the limits of the same country, if a poem, turning upon the jealousies of court intrigue, the pride of rank, and the cabals of sovereigns and statesmen, were put into the hands of village maidens or clownish labourers, is it not obvious that the remoteness of the manners, characters, and feelings from their own would first surprise, and then revolt them — and that the moral, intellectual, and adventitious superiority of the personages concerned, would, instead of enhancing the interest, entirely destroy it, and very speedily extinguish all sympathy with their passions, and all curiosity

about their fate? — Now, what gentlemen and ladies are to a ferocious savage, or politicians and princesses to an ordinary rustic, the exaggerated persons of such poetry as we are now considering, are to the ordinary readers of poetry. They do not believe in the possibility of their existence, or their adventures. They do not comprehend the principles of their conduct, and have no thorough sympathy with the feelings that are ascribed to them.

We have carried this speculation, we believe, a little too far — and, with reference to the volume before us, it would be more correct perhaps to say, that it had suggested these observations, than that they are strictly applicable to it. For though its faults are certainly of the kind we have been endeavouring to describe, it would be quite unjust to characterise it by its faults, which are beyond all doubt less conspicuous than its beauties. There is not only a richness and brilliancy of diction and imagery spread over the whole work, that indicate the greatest activity and elegance of fancy in the author; but it is every where pervaded still more strikingly with a strain of tender and noble feeling, poured out with such warmth and abundance, as to steal insensibly on the heart of the reader, and gradually to overflow it with a tide of sympathetic emotion. There are passages, indeed, and these neither few nor brief, over which the very Genius of poetry seems to have breathed his richest enchantment — where the melody of the verse and the beauty of the images conspire so harmoniously with the force and tenderness of the emotion, that the whole is blended into one deep and bright stream of sweetness and feeling, along which the spirit of the reader is born passively away, through long reaches of delight. Mr. Moore's poetry, indeed, where his happiest vein is opened, realises, more exactly than that of any other writer, the splendid account which is given by Comus of the song of

> "His mother Circe, and the Sirens three,
> Amid the flowery-kirtled Naiades,
> Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,
> And lap it in Elysium."

And though it is certainly to be regretted that he should so often have broken the measure with more frivolous strains, or filled up its intervals with a sort of brilliant *falsetto*, it should never be forgotten, that his excellences are at least as peculiar to himself as his faults, and, on the whole, perhaps, more characteristic of his genius. †

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We have now said enough, to let our readers understand both what it is, and what we think of it. Its great fault certainly is its excessive finery — and its great charm the inexhaustible copiousness of its imagery — the sweetness and ease of its diction — and the beauty of the objects and sentiments with which it is concerned. Its finery, it should also be observed, is not the vulgar ostentation which so often disguises poverty or meanness — but the extravagance of excessive wealth. We have said this, however, we believe, before — and suspect we have little more to say.

All poets, who really love poetry, and live in a poetical age, are great imitators; and the character of their writings may often be as correctly ascertained by observing whom they imitate, and whom they abstain from

† Here follows an interesting analysis of the poems, with abundant specimens. The critical observations on the passages quoted are well worth the reader's perusal. See from page 8. to the termination of the *critique*.

imitating, as from any thing else. Mr. Moore, in the volume before us, reminds us oftener of Mr. Southey and Lord Byron than of any other of his contemporaries. The resemblance is sometimes to the Roderic of the first mentioned, but most frequently to his Kehama. This may be partly owing to the nature of the subject; but, in many passages, the coincidence seems to be more radical, and to indicate a considerable conformity, in taste, and habits of conception. Mr. Southey's tone, indeed, is more assuming, his manner more solemn, and his diction weaker. Mr. Moore is more lively — his figures and images come more thickly — and his language is at once more familiar and more strengthened with points and antitheses. In other respects, the descriptive passages in Kehama bear a remarkable affinity to many in the work before us — in the brightness of the colouring, and the amplitude and beauty of the details. It is in his descriptions of love, and of female loveliness, that there is the strongest resemblance to Lord Byron — at least to the larger poems of that noble author. In the powerful and condensed expression of strong emotion, Mr. Moore seems to us rather to have imitated the tone of some of his lordship's smaller pieces — but imitated them as only an original genius could imitate — as Lord Byron himself may be said, in his later pieces, to have imitated those of an earlier date. — There is less to remind us of Scott than we can very well account for, when we consider the great range and variety of that most fascinating and powerful writer: and we must say, that if Mr. Moore could bring the resemblance a little closer, and exchange a portion of his superfluous images and ecstasies for an equivalent share of Mr. Scott's gift of interesting and delighting us with pictures of familiar nature, and of that spirit and energy which never rises to extravagance, we think he would be a gainer by the exchange. To Mr. Crabbe there is no resemblance at all: and we only mention his name, to observe, that he and Mr. Moore seem the antipodes of our present poetical sphere, and to occupy the extreme points of refinement and homeliness that can be said to fall within the legitimate dominion of poetry. They could not meet in the middle, we are aware, without changing their nature, and losing their specific character; but each might approach a few degrees, we think, with great mutual advantage. The outposts of all empires are posts of peril — though we do not dispute that there is great honour in maintaining them with success.

ROGERS'S POETRY.*

It may seem very doubtful, whether the progress and the vicissitudes of the elegant arts can be referred to the operation of general laws, with the same plausibility as the exertions of the more robust faculties of the human mind, in the severer forms of science and of useful art. The action of fancy and taste seems to be affected by causes too various and minute to be enumerated with sufficient completeness for the purposes of philosophical theory. To explain them, may appear to be as hopeless an attempt, as to account for one summer being more warm and genial than

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* Poems: by Samuel Rogers: including Fragments of a Poem called the Voyage of Columbus.—Vol. xxii. p. 32. October, 1813.

another. The difficulty must be owned to be great. It renders complete explanations impossible; and it would be insurmountable, even in framing the most general outline of theory, if the various forms assumed by imagination, in the fine arts, did not depend on some of the most conspicuous as well as powerful agents in the moral world. They arise from revolutions of popular sentiments. They are connected with the opinions of the age, and with the manners of the refined class, as certainly, though not as much, as with the passions of the multitude. The comedy of a polished monarchy never could be of the same character with that of a bold and tumultuous democracy. Changes of religion and of government, civil or foreign wars, conquests which derive splendour from distance, or extent, or difficulty; — long tranquillity; — all these, and indeed every conceivable modification of the state of a community, show themselves in the tone of its poetry, and leave long and deep traces on every part of its literature. Geometry is the same, not only at London and Paris, but in the extremes of Athens and Samarcand. But the state of the general feeling in England, at this moment, requires a different poetry from that which delighted our ancestors in the time of Luther or Alfred. It ought to be needless to guard this language from misconception, by an observation, so obviously implied, as that there are some qualities which must be common to all delightful poems of every time and country.

During the greater part of the eighteenth century, the connection of the character of English poetry, with the state of the country, was very easily traced. The period which extended from the English to the French Revolution, was the golden age of authentic history. Governments were secure, nations tranquil, improvements rapid, manners mild beyond the example of any former age. The English nation which possessed the greatest of all human blessings, a wisely constructed popular government, necessarily enjoyed the largest share of every other benefit. The tranquillity of that fortunate period was not disturbed by any of those calamitous, or even extraordinary events, which excite the imagination and inflame the passions. No age was more exempt from the prevalence of any species of popular enthusiasm. Poetry, in this state of things, partook of that calm, argumentative, moral, and directly useful character into which it naturally subsides, when there are no events which call up the higher passions; — when every talent is allured into the immediate service of a prosperous and improving society; — and when wit, taste, diffused literature, and fastidious criticism, combine to deter the young writer from the more arduous enterprises of poetical genius. In such an age every art becomes rational. Reason is the power which presides in a calm: but reason guides, rather than impels; and, though it must regulate every exertion of genius, it never can rouse it to vigorous action.

The school of Dryden and Pope, which prevailed till a very late period of the last century, is neither the most poetical nor the most national part of our literary annals. These great poets sometimes indeed ventured into the regions of pure poetry. But their general character is, that "not in fancy's maze they wandered long;" that they rather approached the elegant correctness of our Continental neighbours, than supported the daring flight which, in the former age, had borne English poetry to a sublimer elevation, than that of any other modern people of the West. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, great, though quiet changes, began to manifest themselves in the republic of letters, in every European nation which retained any portion of mental activity. About that time, the exclusive authority of our great

rhyming poets began to be weakened; new tastes and fashions began to show themselves in the poetical world. A school of poetry must have prevailed long enough, to be probably on the verge of downfall, before its practice be embodied in a correspondent system of criticism. Johnson was the critic of our second poetical school. As far as his prejudices of a political or religious kind did not disqualify him for all criticism, he was admirably fitted by nature to be the critic of this species of poetry. Without more imagination, sensibility, or delicacy than it required, — not always with perhaps quite enough for its higher parts, — he possessed sagacity, shrewdness, experience, knowledge of mankind, a taste for rational and orderly compositions, and a disposition to accept, instead of poetry, that lofty and vigorous declamation in harmonious verse, of which he himself was capable, and to which his great masters sometimes descended. His spontaneous admiration scarcely soared above Dryden. "Merit of a loftier class he rather saw than felt." Shakspeare has transcendent excellence of every sort, and for every critic, except those who are repelled by the faults which usually attend sublime virtues, — character and manners, morality and prudence, as well as imagery and passion. Johnson did indeed perform a vigorous act of reluctant justice towards Milton; but it was a proof, to use his own words, that

> "At length our mighty Bard's victorious lays
> Fill the loud voice of universal praise;
> And baffled Spite, with hopeless anguish dumb,
> Yields to renown the centuries to come!"

The deformities of the life of Gray ought not to be ascribed to jealousy — for Johnson's mind, though coarse, was not mean — but to the prejudices of his University, his faction, and his poetical sect: and this last bigotry is the more remarkable, because it is exerted against the most skilful and tasteful of innovators, who, in reviving more poetical subjects and a more splendid diction, has employed more care and finish, than those who aimed only at correctness.

The interval which elapsed between the death of Goldsmith and the rise of Cowper, is perhaps more barren than any other twelve years in the history of our poetry since the accession of Elizabeth. It seemed as if the fertile soil was at length exhausted. But it had in fact only ceased to exhibit its accustomed produce. The established poetry had worn out either its own resources, or the constancy of its readers. Former attempts to introduce novelty had been either too weak, or too early. Neither the beautiful fancy of Collins, nor the learned and ingenious industry of Warton, nor even the union of sublime genius with consummate art in Gray, had produced a general change in poetical composition. But the fulness of time was approaching; and a revolution has been accomplished, of which the commencement nearly coincides (not as we conceive accidentally) with that of the political revolution which has changed the character as well as the condition of Europe. It has been a thousand times observed, that nations become weary even of excellence, and seek a new way of writing, though it should be a worse. But besides the operation of satiety — the general cause of literary revolutions — several particular circumstances seem to have affected the late changes of our poetical taste; of which, two are more conspicuous than the rest.

In the natural progress of society, the songs which are the effusions of the feelings of a rude tribe, are gradually polished into a poetry still retaining

the marks of those national opinions, sentiments, and manners, from which it originally sprung. The plants are improved by cultivation; but they are still the native produce of the soil. The only perfect example which we know, of this sort, is Greece. Knowledge and useful art, and perhaps in a great measure religion, the Greeks received from the East. But as they studied no foreign language, it was impossible that any foreign literature should influence the progress of theirs. Not even the name of a Persian, Assyrian, Phenician, or Egyptian poet is alluded to by a Greek writer; — the Greek poetry was therefore wholly national. The Pelasgic ballads were insensibly formed into epic, and tragic, and lyric poems: but the heroes, the opinions, the customs, continued as exclusively Grecian, as they had been when the Hellenic minstrels knew little beyond the Adriatic and the Egean. The literature of Rome was a copy from that of Greece. When the classical studies revived amidst the chivalrous manners and feudal institutions of Gothic Europe, the imitation of ancient poets struggled against the power of modern sentiments, with various event, in different times and countries, but every where in such a manner, as to give somewhat of an artificial and exotic character to poetry. Jupiter and the Muses appeared in the poems of Christian nations. The feelings and principles of democracies were copied by the gentlemen of Teutonic monarchies or aristocracies. The sentiments of the poet in his verse, were not those which actuated him in his conduct. The forms and rules of composition were borrowed from antiquity, instead of spontaneously arising from the manner of thinking of modern communities. In Italy, when letters first revived, the chivalrous principle was too near the period of its full vigour, to be oppressed by the foreign learning. Ancient ornaments were borrowed, but the romantic form was prevalent; and where the forms were classical, the spirit continued to be romantic. The structure of Tasso's poem was that of the Grecian epic; but his heroes were Christian Knights. French poetry having been somewhat unaccountably late in its rise, and slow in its progress, reached its brilliant period, when all Europe had considerably lost its ancient characteristic principles, and was fully impregnated with classical ideas. Hence it acquired faultless elegance. Hence also it became less natural — more timid and more imitative — more like a feeble translation of Roman poetry. The first age of English poetry, in the reign of Elizabeth, displayed a combination, fantastic enough, of chivalrous fancy and feeling with classical pedantry: but, upon the whole, the native genius was unsubdued; and the poems of that age, with all their faults, and partly perhaps from their faults, are the most national part of our poetry, as they undoubtedly contain its highest beauties. From the accession of James to the Civil War, the glory of Shakspeare turned the whole national genius to the drama; and, after the Restoration, a new and classical school arose, under whom our old and peculiar literature was abandoned, and almost forgotten. But all imported tastes in literature must be in some measure superficial. The poetry which grew in the bosoms of a people, is always capable of being revived by a skilful hand. When the brilliant and poignant lines of Pope began to pall on the public ear, it was natural that we should revert to the cultivation of our indigenous poetry.

Nor was this the sole, or perhaps the chief, agent which was working a poetical change. As the condition and character of the former age had produced an argumentative, didactic, sententious, prudential, and satirical poetry; so, the approaches to a new order (or rather at first disorder) in

political society, were attended by correspondent movements in the poetical world.—Bolder speculations began to prevail: and we shall soon have a more proper occasion to remark how the feelings, which were the forerunners of civil mutation, called for a sterner and more lofty system of ethics; and to point out the slender but important threads which bound them to the most abtruse researches of metaphysics. A combination of the science and art of the tranquil period, with the hardy enterprises of that which succeeded, gave rise to scientific poems, in which a bold attempt was made, by the mere force of diction, to give a poetical interest and elevation to the coldest parts of knowledge, and to those arts which have been hitherto considered as the meanest. Having been forced above their natural place by the first wonder, they have not yet recovered from the subsequent depression; nor will a similar attempt be successful, without a more temperate use of power over style, until the diffusion of physical knowledge renders it familiar to the popular imagination, and till the prodigies worked by the mechanical arts shall have bestowed on them a character of grandeur.

As the agitation of men's minds approached the period of explosion, its effects on literature became more visible. The desire of strong emotion succeeded to the solicitude to avoid disgust. Fictions, both dramatic and narrative, were formed according to the school of Rousseau and Goethe. The mixture of comic and tragic pictures once more displayed itself, as in the ancient and national drama. The sublime and energetic feelings of devotion began to be more frequently associated with poetry. The tendency of political speculation concurred in directing the mind of the poet to the intense and undisguised passions of the uneducated, which fastidious politeness had excluded from the subjects of poetical imitation.

The history of nations unlike ourselves—the fantastic mythology and ferocious superstition of distant times and countries—or the legends of our own antique faith, and the romances of our fabulous and heroic ages, became favourite themes of poetry. Traces of a higher order of feeling appeared in the contemplations in which the poet indulged, and in the events and scenes which he delighted to describe. The fire with which a chivalrous tale was told, made the reader inattentive to negligences in the story or the style. Poetry became more devout, more contemplative, more mystical, more visionary,—more alien from the taste of those whose poetry is only a polished prosaic verse,—more full of antique superstition, and more prone to daring innovation,—painting both coarser realities and purer imaginations, than she had before hazarded,—sometimes buried in the profound quiet required by the dreams of fancy,—sometimes turbulent and martial,—seeking "fierce wars and faithful loves" in those times long past, when the frequency of the most dreadful dangers produced heroic energy and the ardour of faithful affection.

Even the direction given to the traveller by the accidents of war has not been without its influence. Greece, the mother of freedom and of poetry in the west, which had long employed only the antiquary, the artist, and the philologist, was at length destined, after an interval of many silent and inglorious ages, to awaken the genius of a poet. Full of enthusiasm for those perfect forms of heroism and liberty, which his imagination had placed in the recesses of antiquity, he gave vent to his impatience of the imperfections of living men and real institutions, in an original strain of sublime satire, which clothes moral anger in imagery of an almost horrible grandeur; and which, though it cannot coincide with the estimate of reason, yet could only flow from that worship of perfection, which is the soul of all true poetry.

The tendency of poetry to become national, was in more than one case remarkable. While the Scottish middle age inspired the most popular poet perhaps of the eighteenth century, the national genius of Ireland at length found a poetical representative, whose exquisite ear and flexible fancy wantoned in all the varieties of poetical luxury, from the levities to the fondness of love, from polished pleasantry to ardent passion, and from the social joys of private life to a tender and mournful patriotism, taught by the melancholy fortunes of an illustrious country;—with a range adapted to every nerve in the composition of a people susceptible of all feelings which have the colour of generosity, and more exempt probably than any other from degrading and unpoetical vices.

The failure of innumerable adventurers is inevitable, in literary, as well as in political revolutions. The inventor seldom perfects his invention, The uncouthness of the novelty, the clumsiness with which it is managed by an unpractised hand, and the dogmatical contempt of criticism natural to the pride and enthusiasm of the innovator, combine to expose him to ridicule, and generally terminate in his being admired, though warmly, by few of his contemporaries — remembered only occasionally in after times—and supplanted in general estimation by more cautious and skilful imitators. With the very reverse of unfriendly feelings, we observe that erroneous theories respecting poetical diction—exclusive and proscriptive notions in criticism, which in adding new provinces to poetry would deprive her of ancient dominions and lawful instruments of rule—and a neglect of that extreme regard to general sympathy, and even accidental prejudice, which is necessary to guard poetical novelties against their natural enemy the satirist—have powerfully counteracted an attempt, equally moral and philosophical, made by a writer of undisputed poetical genius, to enlarge the territories of art, by unfolding the poetical interest which lies latent in the common acts of the humblest men, and in the most ordinary modes of feeling, as well as in the most familiar scenes of nature.

The various opinions which may naturally be formed of the merit of individual writers, form no necessary part of our consideration. We consider the present as one of the most flourishing periods of English poetry. But those who condemn all contemporary poets, need not on that account dissent from our speculations. It is sufficient to have proved the reality, and in part perhaps to have explained the origin, of a literary revolution. At no time does the success of writers bear so uncertain a proportion to their genius, as when the rules of judging and the habits of feeling are unsettled.

It is not uninteresting, even as a matter of speculation, to observe the fortune of a poem which, like the Pleasures of Memory, appeared at the commencement of this literary revolution, without paying court to the revolutionary tastes, or seeking distinction by resistance to them. It borrowed no aid either from prejudice or innovation. It neither copied the fashion of the age which was passing away, nor offered any homage to the rising novelties. It resembles, only in measure, the poems of the eighteenth century, which were written in heroic rhyme. Neither the brilliant sententiousness of Pope, nor the frequent languor and negligence perhaps inseparable from the exquisite nature of Goldsmith, could be traced in a poem, from which taste and labour equally banished mannerism and inequality. It was patronised by no sect or faction. It was neither imposed on the public by any literary cabal, nor forced into notice by the noisy anger of conspicuous enemies. Yet, destitute as it was of every

foreign help, it acquired a popularity originally very great; and which has not only continued amidst extraordinary fluctuation of general taste, but increased amidst a succession of formidable competitors. No production, so popular, was probably ever so little censured by criticism. It was approved by the critics, as much as read and applauded by the people; and thus seemed to combine the applause of Contemporaries with the suffrage of the representatives of Posterity.

It is needless to make extracts from a poem which is familiar to every reader. In selection, indeed, no two readers would probably agree. But the description of the Gipsies — of the Boy quitting his Father's house — and of the Savoyard recollecting the mountainous scenery of his country — and the descriptive commencement of the Tale in Cumberland, have remained most deeply impressed on our minds. We should be disposed to quote the following verses, as not surpassed, in pure and chaste elegance, by any English lines: —

> " When Joy's bright sun hath shed his evening ray,
> And Hope's delusive meteors cease to play;
> When clouds on clouds the smiling prospect close,
> Still through the gloom thy star serenely glows:
> Like yon fair orb she gilds the brow of Night
> With the mild magic of reflected light."

The conclusion of the fine passage on the veterans at Greenwich and Chelsea, has a pensive dignity which beautifully corresponds with the scene: —

> " Long have ye known reflection's genial ray
> Gild the calm close of valour's various day."

And we cannot resist the pleasure of quoting the moral, tender, and elegant lines which close the Poems: —

> " Lighter than air, Hope's summer-visions fly,
> If but a fleeting cloud obscure the sky;
> If but a beam of sober reason play,
> Lo, fancy's fairy frost-work melts away!
> But can the wiles of art, the grasp of power,
> Snatch the rich relics of a well-spent hour?
> These, when the trembling spirit wings her flight,
> Pour round her path a stream of living light;
> And gild those pure and perfect realms of rest,
> Where virtue triumphs, and her sons are blest!"

The descriptive passages of this classical poem, require indeed a closer inspection, and a more exercised eye, than those of some celebrated contemporaries, who sacrifice elegance to effect, and whose figures stand out in bold relief, from the general roughness of their more unfinished compositions. And in the moral parts there is often discoverable a Virgilian art, which suggests, rather than displays, the various and contrasted scenes of human life, — and adds to the power of language by a certain air of reflection and modesty, in the preference of measured terms over those of more apparent energy.

In the Epistle to a Friend, the Panegyric on Engraving — the View from the Poet's Country-house — the Bee-hives of the Loire — and the Rustic Bath, will immediately present themselves to the recollection of most poetical readers.

In the View from the House, the scene is neither delightful from very superior beauty, nor striking by singularity, nor powerful from reminding us of terrible passions or memorable deeds. It consists of the more ordinary of the beautiful features of nature, neither exaggerated nor repre-

sented with curious minuteness, but exhibited with picturesque elegance, in connection with those tranquil emotions which they call up in the calm order of a virtuous mind, in every condition of society and of life.

The Verses on the Torso are in a more severe style. The Fragment of a Divine Artist, which awakened the genius of Michael Angelo, seems to disdain ornament: —

> " And dost thou still, thou mass of breathing stone,
> (Thy giant limbs to Night and Chaos hurl'd)
> Still sit as on the fragment of a World;
> Surviving all, majestic and alone?
> What though the spirits of the North, that swept
> Rome from the earth, when in her pomp she slept,
> Smote thee with fury, and thy headless trunk
> Deep in the dust 'mid tower and temple sunk;
> Soon to subdue mankind 'twas thine to rise,
> Still, still unquell'd thy glorious energies!
> Aspiring minds, with thee conversing, caught
> Bright revelations of the Good they sought;
> By thee that long-lost spell in secret given,
> To draw down Gods, and lift the soul to Heaven!"

If poetical merit bore any proportion to magnitude, "the Sick Chamber," and " the Butterfly," would deserve no attention: but it would be difficult to name two small poems, by the same writer, in which he has attained such high degrees of kinds of excellence so dissimilar. The first has a truth of detail, which, considered merely as painting, is admirable; but assumes a high character, when it is felt to be that minute remembrance, with which affection recollects every circumstance that could influence a beloved sufferer. Though the morality which concludes the second be in itself very beautiful, it may be doubted whether the verses would not have left a more unmixed delight, if the address had remained as a mere sport of fancy, without the seriousness of an object, or an application.

The Verses, written in Westminster Abbey, are surrounded by dangerous recollections. They aspire to commemorate Fox — and to copy some of the grandest thoughts in the most sublime work of Bossuet. Nothing can satisfy the expectation awakened by such names. Yet we venture to quote the following lines, with the assurance, that there are some of them which would be most envied by the best writers of this age: —

> " Friend of the Absent! Guardian of the Dead!
> Who but would here their sacred sorrows shed?
> (Such as He shed on Nelson's closing grave;
> How soon to claim the sympathy He gave!)
> In Him, resentful of another's wrong,
> The dumb were eloquent, the feeble strong.
> Truth from his lips a charm celestial drew —
> Ah, who so mighty and so gentle too?"

The scenery of Loch Long is among the grandest in Scotland; and the following description of it shows the power of feeling and painting. Perhaps, however, it partly owes its insertion here, to individual recollections, as well as national sentiments. In this island, the taste for Nature has grown with the progress of refinement. It is most alive in those who are most brilliantly distinguished in social and active life. It elevates the mind above the meanness which it might contract in the rivalship for praise; and preserves those habits of reflection and sensibility, which receive so many rude shocks in the coarse contests of the world. Not many summer hours can be passed in the most mountainous solitudes of Scotland,

without meeting some who are worthy to be remembered with the sublime objects of Nature which they had travelled so far to admire.

" Upon another shore I stood,
And look'd upon another flood*;
Great Ocean's self! ('Tis He, who fills
That vast and awful depth of hills;)
Where many an elf was playing round,
Who treads unshod his classic ground;
And speaks, his native rocks among,
As FINGAL spoke, and OSSIAN sung.
Night fell; and dark and darker grew
That narrow sea, that narrow sky,
As o'er the glimmering waves we flew,
The sea-bird rustling, wailing by.
And now the grampus, half descried,
Black and huge above the tide;
The cliffs and promontories there,
Front to front, and broad and bare,
Each beyond each, with giant-feet
Advancing as in haste to meet;
The shatter'd fortress, whence the Dane
Blew his shrill blast, nor rush'd in vain,
Tyrant of the drear domain;
All into midnight-shadow sweep —
When day springs upward from the deep!†
Kindling the waters in its flight,
The prow wakes splendour; and the oar,
That rose and fell unseen before,
Flashes in a sea of light!
Glad sign, and sure! for now we hail
Thy flowers, Glenfinart, in the gale;
And bright indeed the path should be,
That leads to Friendship and to Thee?
Oh blest retreat, and sacred too!
Sacred as when the bell of prayer
Toll'd duly on the desert air,
And crosses deck'd thy summits blue.
Oft, like some lov'd romantic tale,
Oft shall my weary mind recall,
Amid the hum and stir of men,
Thy beechen grove and waterfall,
The ferry with its gliding sail,
And Her — the Lady of the Glen!"

The most conspicuous of the novelties of this volume, is the poem or poems, entitled, " Fragments of the Voyage of Columbus." The subject of this poem is, politically or philosophically considered, among the most important in the annals of mankind. The introduction of Christianity (humanly viewed) — the irruption of the Northern barbarians — the contest between the Christian and Mussulman nations in Syria — the two inventions of Gunpowder and Printing — the emancipation of the human understanding by the Reformation — the discovery of America, and of a maritime passage to Asia in the last ten years of the fifteenth century — are the events which have produced the greatest and most durable effects since the establishment of civilisation, and the consequent commence-

* Loch Long.
† A phenomenon described by many navigators.

ment of authentic history. But the poetical capabilities of an event bear no proportion to historical importance. None of the consequences that do not strike the senses or the fancy, can interest the poet. The greatest of the transactions above enumerated, are obviously incapable of entering into poetry. The Crusades were not without permanent effects on the state of men: but their poetical interest does not arise from these effects; — and it immeasurably surpasses them.

Whether the voyage of Columbus be destined to be for ever incapable of becoming the subject of an epic poem, is a question which we have scarcely the means of answering. The success of great writers has often so little corresponded with the promise of their subject, that we might be almost tempted to think the choice of a subject indifferent. The story of Hamlet, or of Paradise Lost, would before hand have been pronounced to be unmanageable. Perhaps the genius of Shakspeare and of Milton has rather compensated for the incorrigible defects of ungrateful subjects, than conquered them. The course of ages may produce the poetical genius — the historical materials and the national feelings, for an American epic poem. There is yet but one State in America, and that state is hardly become a nation. At some future period, when every part of the continent has been the scene of memorable events, when the discovery and conquest have receded into that legendary dimness which allows fancy to mould them at her pleasure, the early history of America may afford scope for the genius of a thousand national poets; and while some may soften the cruelty which darkens the daring energy of Cortez and Pizarro — while others may, in perhaps new forms of poetry, ennoble the pacific conquests of Penn — and while the genius, the exploits, and the fate of Raleigh, may render his establishments probably the most alluring of American subjects — every inhabitant of the new world will turn his eyes with filial reverence towards Columbus, — and regard, with equal enthusiasm, the voyage which laid the foundation of so many states, and peopled a continent with civilised men. — Most epic subjects, but especially such a subject as Columbus, require either the fire of an actor in the scene, or the religious reverence of a very distant posterity. Homer, as well as Ercilla, and Camoens, show what may be done by an epic poet who himself feels the passions of his heroes. It must not be denied, that Virgil has borrowed a colour of refinement from the Court of Augustus, in painting the age of Priam and of Dido. Evander is a solitary and exquisite model of primitive manners, divested of grossness without losing their simplicity. But to an European poet, in this age of the world, the Voyage of Columbus is too naked and too exactly defined by history. It has no variety, scarcely any succession of events. It consists of one scene, during which two or three simple passions continue in a state of the highest excitement. It is a voyage with intense anxiety in every bosom, controlled by magnanimous fortitude in the leader, and producing among his followers a fear sometimes submissive, sometimes mutinous, always ignoble It admits no variety of character — no unexpected revolutions; and even the issue — the sight of undiscovered land, though of unspeakable importance, and admirably adapted to some kinds of poetry, is not an event of such outward dignity and splendour as ought naturally to close the active and brilliant course of an epic poem.

The author has accordingly not attempted such a poem; he professes only to offer fragments of the Voyage. To prove that these fragments have not the interest of a story, is a mere waste of critical ingenuity. The very title of Fragments, is a disavowal of all pretension to such an

interest. Many of them have the appearance of having been originally members of a Lyric poem on the voyage of Columbus; and they still retain that predominant character. They are not so much parts of a narrative, as the sentiments or the visions of the poet. In the progress of insertion and amplification, they seem to have become separate poems—Lyrical, Descriptive, and Dramatic—on various events and scenes of the voyage. It cannot be true, that, because the whole is not a favourable subject for epic poetry, many of the parts should not be well adapted to such poems. Each fragment is to be tried by its separate excellence. Part of that excellence will consist in their relation and allusion to each other, which naturally arises from affinity of subject. If there be any other criterion by which such poems are to be tried, it can only be their fitness to be inserted into an epic poem, if such a poem could be founded upon the event. The title, Fragments, implies also a renunciation of all claim to whatever merit may arise from the artifices of connection and transition. This will be considered as matter of very serious reproach, by those who adopt the maxim of French criticism, that difficulty conquered is the chief triumph of talent—who, to be consistent with themselves, ought to consider the most minute expedient of art as superior to the noblest exertions of genius.

To examine the general question of epic machinery, on an occasion like the present, would be impertinent. It is natural that the Fragments should give a specimen of the marvellous as well as of the other constituents of epic fiction. We may however observe, that it is neither the intention nor the tendency of poetical machinery, to supersede second causes—to fetter the will—and to make human creatures appear as the mere instruments of Destiny. It is introduced, to satisfy that insatiable demand for a nature more exalted than that which we know by experience—which creates all poetry—and which is most active in its highest species, and in its most perfect productions. It is not to account for the thoughts and feelings, that the superhuman agents are brought down upon earth. It is rather for the contrary purpose, of lifting them into a mysterious dignity beyond the cognizance of reason. There is a material difference between the acts which superior beings perform and the sentiments which they inspire. It is true, that when a God fights against men, there can be no uncertainty or anxiety, and consequently no interest, about the event,—unless indeed in the rude theology of Homer, where Minerva may animate the Greeks, while Mars excites the Trojans. But it is quite otherwise with these divine persons inspiring passion, or represented as agents in the great phenomena of nature. Venus and Mars inspire love or valour. They give a noble origin and a dignified character to these sentiments. But the sentiments themselves act according to the laws of our nature; and their celestial source has no tendency to impair their power over human sympathy. No event, which has not too much modern vulgarity to be susceptible of alliance with poetry, can be incapable of being ennobled by that eminently poetical art which ascribes it either to the supreme will, or to the agency of beings who are greater than human. The wisdom of Columbus is neither less venerable, nor less his own, because it is supposed to flow more directly than that of other wise men, from the inspiration of Heaven. The mutiny of his seamen is not less interesting or formidable, because the poet traces it to the suggestion of those malignant spirits, in whom the imagination, independent of all theological doctrines, is naturally prone to personify and embody the causes of evil.

Unless, indeed, the marvellous be a part of the popular creed at the period of the action, the reader of a subsequent age will refuse to sympathise with it. His poetical faith is founded in sympathy with the poetical personages. What they believed during their lives, he suffers to enter his imagination during the moment of enthusiasm in which he adopts their feelings. Still more objectionable is a marvellous, neither believed by the reader nor by the hero; — like a great part of the machinery of the Henriade and the Lusiad, which indeed is not only absolutely ineffective, but rather disennobles heroic fiction, by association with light and frivolous ideas. Allegorical persons (if the expression be allowed) are only in the way to become agents. The abstraction has received a faint outline of form: but it has not yet acquired those individual marks, and characteristic peculiarities, which render it a really existing being. Beauty and love gradually form themselves into Venus and Cupid. To employ them in the intermediate stage through which they must pass in the course of their transformation from abstractions into deities, is an inartificial and uninteresting expedient. On the other hand, the more sublime parts of our own religion, and more especially those which are common to all religion, are too awful and too philosophical for poetical effect. If we except Paradise Lost, where all is supernatural, and where the ancestors of the human race are not strictly human beings, it must be owned that no successful attempt has been made to ally a human action with the sublimer principles of the Christian theology. Some opinions, which may perhaps, without irreverence, be said to be rather appendages to the Christian system, than essential parts of it, are in that sort of intermediate state which fits them for the purposes of poetry; — sufficiently exalted to ennoble those human actions with which they are blended — and not so exactly defined, nor so deeply revered, as to be inconsistent with the liberty of imagination. The guardian angels, in the project of Dryden, had the inconvenience of having never taken any deep root in popular belief. The agency of evil spirits, firmly believed in the age of Columbus, seems to afford the only species of machinery which can be introduced into his voyage. With the truth of facts poetry can have no concern; but the truth of manners is necessary to its persons — and its marvellous must be such as these persons believed. If the minute investigations of the notes to this poem had related to historical details, they would have been insignificant; but they are intended to justify the human and the supernatural parts of it, by an appeal to the manners and to the opinions of the age.

Having premised these general observations, it is now only necessary to quote some of these fragments, that the reader, if he adopt the above principles, may have the means of applying them to this poem.

The proposition — The first appearance of the ships, and the trade-wind — in the first canto, appear to us to be passages which, in beauty of conception and execution, it is not easy to equal.

> " Say who first pass'd the portals of the West,
> And the great Secret of the Deep possess'd;
> Who first the standard of his Faith unfurl'd
> On the dread confines of an unknown World;
> Sung ere his coming — and by Heaven design'd
> To lift the veil that cover'd half mankind! . . .
> 'Twas night. The Moon, o'er the wide wave, disclosed
> Her awful face; and Nature's self reposed;

When, slowly rising in the azure sky,
Three white sails shone — but to no mortal eye,
Entering a boundless sea. In slumber cast,
The very ship-boy, on the dizzy mast,
Half breathed his orisons! Alone unchanged,
Calmly, beneath, the great Commander ranged,
Thoughtful not sad. 'Thy will be done!' he cried. —
He spoke, and, at his call, a mighty Wind,
Not like the fitful blast, with fury blind,
But deep, majestic, in its destined course,
Rush'd with unerring, unrelenting force,
From the bright East. Tides duly ebb'd and flow'd;
Stars rose and set; and new horizons glow'd;
Yet still it blew! As with primeval sway,
Still did its ample spirit, night and day,
Move on the waters!"

In the following verses a grand picture is exhibited with the simplicity which becomes it: —

"Yet who but He undaunted could explore
A world of waves — a sea without a shore,
Trackless and vast and wild as that reveal'd
When round the Ark the birds of tempest wheel'd;
When all was still in the destroying hour —
No trace of man! no vestige of his power!"*

The character of Columbus can scarcely be presented in a light more venerable than in the opening lines of the fifth Canto: —

"War and the Great in War let others sing,
Havoc and spoil, and tears and triumphing;
The morning-march that flashes to the sun,
The feast of vultures when the day is done;
And the strange tale of many slain for one!
I sing a Man, amidst his sufferings here,
Who watch'd and served in humbleness and fear;
Gentle to others, to himself severe.....
Still unsubdued by Danger's varying form,
Still, as unconscious of the coming storm,
He look'd elate! His beard, his mien sublime,
Shadow'd by Age — by Age before the time,
From many a sorrow borne in many a clime,
Moved every heart.'"

The beauty of the verses which describe the first sight of the New World, has been universally acknowledged. But they have been some-

* By a coincidence which must have been accidental, the same original conception presented itself to a writer of the first order of genius. "Cette superbe mer, sur laquelle l'homme jamais ne peut imprimer sa trace. Si les vaisseaux sillonnent un moment les ondes, la vague vient effacer cette légère marque de servitude, et la mer réparoit telle qu'elle fut au premier jour de sa création."— *Corinne*, i. 30.

In another passage of the same celebrated work is a thought which, by a coincidence equally casual, is the basis of one of the noblest stanzas of English lyric poetry. "Et n'est-ce pas en effet l'air natal pour un Anglois qu'un vaisseau au milieu de la mer?" — *Corinne*, ii. 299.

Britannia needs no bulwark,
No towers along the steep;
Her march is on the mountain wave,
Her home is on the deep. — *Campbell's Mar. of Engl.*

what hastily supposed to represent the same event as occurring at different times — in the evening, and at midnight. It is obvious, however, that the repugnance is only in the imagination of the critic. Evening is described as the hour of vespers; and midnight, as the moment when a light is discovered on the unknown shore. Nothing is more natural, than that the evening which was to precede so important a night, should be painted by the poet: —

" Twice in the zenith blazed the orb of light;
No shade, all sun, insufferably bright!
Then the long line found rest — in coral groves
Silent and dark, where the sea-lion roves: —
And all on deck, kindling to life again,
Sent forth their anxious spirits o'er the main.
But whence, as wafted from Elysium, whence
These perfumes, strangers to the raptured sense?
These boughs of gold, and fruits of heavenly hue,
Tinging with vermeil light the billows blue?
And say, oh say, (how blest the eye that spied,
The hand that snatch'd it sparkling in the tide)
Whose cunning carved this vegetable bowl,
Symbol of social rites, and intercourse of soul?' ....
Such to their grateful ear the gush of springs,
Who course the ostrich, as away she wings;
Sons of the desert! who delight to dwell
'Mid kneeling camels round the sacred well.
The sails were furl'd: with many a melting close,
Solemn and slow the evening anthem rose,
Rose to the Virgin. 'Twas the hour of day,
When setting suns o'er summer seas display
A path of glory, opening in the west
To golden climes, and islands of the blest;
And human voices, on the silent air,
Went o'er the waves in songs of gladness there!
Chosen of Men! 'twas thine, at noon of night,
First from the prow to hail the glimmering light.
'Pedro! Rodrigo! there, methought, it shone!
There — in the west! and now, alas, 'tis gone! —
'Twas all a dream! we gaze and gaze in vain!
— But mark and speak not, there it comes again!
It moves! — what form unseen, what being there
With torch-like lustre fires the murky air?
His instincts, passions, say, how like our own?
Oh! when will day reveal a world unknown?'"

The whole vision which concludes the poem, is eminently beautiful. But it is needless to prolong our extracts from a volume, which must long ago have been in the hands of every reader of this Review. The extracts already given will show, that it always has consummate elegance, and often unaffected grandeur. The author is not one of those poets who is flat for a hundred lines, in order to heighten the apparent elevation of one more fortunate verse. He does not conduct his readers over a desert, to betray them into the temper in which they bestow the charms of Paradise on a few trees and a fountain in a green spot.

Perhaps there is no volume in our language of which it can be so truly said, as of the present, that it is equally exempt from the frailties of negligence and the vices of affectation. The exquisite polish of style is indeed more admired by the artist than by the people. The gentle and

elegant pleasure which it imparts, can only be felt by a calm reason, an exercised taste, and a mind free from turbulent passions. But these beauties of execution can exist only in combination with much of the primary beauties of thought and feeling. Without a considerable portion of them, the works of the greatest genius must perish; and poets of the first rank depend on them for no small part of the perpetuity of their fame. They are permanent beauties. In poetry, though not in eloquence, it is less to rouse the passions of a moment, than to satisfy the taste of all ages.

In estimating the poetical rank of Mr. Rogers, it must not be forgotten that popularity never can arise from elegance alone. The vices of a poem may render it popular; and virtues of a faint character may be sufficient to preserve a languishing and cold reputation. But to be both popular poets and classical writers, is the rare lot of those few who are released from all solicitude about their literary fame. It often happens to successful writers, that the lustre of their first productions throws a temporary cloud over some of those which follow. Of all literary misfortunes, this is the most easily endured, and the most speedily repaired. It is generally no more than a momentary illusion produced by disappointed admiration, which expected more from the talents of the admired writer than any talents could perform.

Mr. Rogers has long passed that period of probation, during which it may be excusable to feel some painful solicitude about the reception of every new work. Whatever may be the rank assigned hereafter to his writings, when compared to each other, the writer has most certainly taken his place among the classical poets of his country. *

THE BEAUTIES OF SHAKSPEARE.†

MANY persons are very sensible of the effect of fine poetry on their feelings, who do not well know how to refer these feelings to their causes; and it is always a delightful thing to be made to see clearly the sources from which our delight has proceeded — and to trace back the mingled stream that has flowed upon our hearts, to the remoter fountains from which it has been gathered; and when this is done with warmth as well as precision, and embodied in an eloquent description of the beauty which is explained, it forms one of the most attractive, and not the least instructive, of literary exercises. In all works of merit, however, and especially in all works of original genius, there are a thousand retiring and less obtrusive graces, which escape hasty and superficial observers, and only give out their beauties to fond and patient contemplation: — a thousand slight and harmonising touches, the merit and the effect of which are equally imperceptible to vulgar eyes; and a thousand indications of the continual presence of that poetical spirit, which can only be recognised by those who are in some measure under its influence, and

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* See a review of Rogers's poem of Human Life, Vol. xxxi. p. 325.

† Characters of Shakspeare's Plays. By William Hazlitt.— Vol. xxviii. p. 472. August, 1817.

have prepared themselves to receive it, by worshipping meekly at the shrines which it inhabits.

In the exposition of these is room enough for originality, — and more room than Mr. Hazlitt has yet filled. In many points, however, he has acquitted himself excellently; — partly in the developement of the principal characters with which Shakspeare has peopled the fancies of all English readers — but principally, we think, in the delicate sensibility with which he has traced, and the natural eloquence with which he has pointed out their familiarity with beautiful forms and images — that eternal recurrence to what is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature — that indestructible love of flowers and odours, and dews and clear waters — and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and woodland solitudes, and moonlight bowers, which are the material elements of poetry — and that fine sense of their undefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul — and which, in the midst of Shakspeare's most busy and atrocious scenes, falls like gleams of sunshine on rocks and ruins — contrasting with all that is rugged and repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements — which HE ALONE has poured out from the richness of his own mind, without effort or restraint, and contrived to intermingle with the play of all the passions and the vulgar course of this world's affairs, without deserting for an instant the proper business of the scene, or appearing to pause or digress from love of ornament or need of repose; — he alone, who, when the object requires it, is always keen and worldly and practical — and who yet, without changing his hand, or stopping his course, scatters around him, as he goes, all sounds and shapes of sweetness — and conjures up landscapes of immortal fragrance and freshness, and peoples them with spirits of glorious aspect and attractive grace — and is a thousand times more full of fancy and imagery, and splendour, than those who, for the sake of such qualities, have shrunk back from the delineation of character or passion, and declined the discussion of human duties and cares. More full of wisdom and ridicule and sagacity, than all the moralists and satirists in existence — he is more wild, airy, and inventive, and more pathetic and fantastic, than all the poets of all regions and ages of the world — and has all those elements so happily mixed up in him, and bears his high faculties so temperately, that the most severe reader cannot complain of him for want of strength or of reason — nor the most sensitive for defect of ornament or ingenuity. Every thing in him is in unmeasured abundance, and unequalled perfection — but every thing so balanced and kept in subordination, as not to jostle or disturb, or take the place of another. The most exquisite poetical conceptions, images, and descriptions, are given with such brevity, and introduced with such skill, as merely to adorn, without loading, the sense they accompany. Although his sails are purple and perfumed, and his prow of beaten gold, they waft him on his voyage, not less but more rapidly and directly than if they had been composed of baser materials. All his excellences, like those of Nature herself, are thrown out together; and, instead of interfering with, support and recommend each other. His flowers are not tied up in garlands, nor his fruits crushed into baskets — but spring living from the soil, in all the dew and freshness of youth; while the graceful foliage in which they lurk, and the ample branches, the rough and vigorous stem, and the wide-spreading roots on which they depend, are present along with them, and share, in their places, the equal care of their Creator.

What other poet has put all the charm of a moonlight landscape into a single line? — and that by an image so true to nature, and so simple, as to seem obvious to the most common observation? —

" See how the Moonlight SLEEPS on yonder bank!" —

Who else has expressed, in three lines, all that is picturesque and lovely in a summer's dawn? — first setting before our eyes, with magical precision, the visible appearances of the infant light, and then, by one graceful and glorious image, pouring on our souls all the freshness, cheerfulness, and sublimity of returning morning? —

——— " See, love! what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East:
Night's candles * are burnt out, — and jocund Day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

Where shall we find sweet sounds and odours so luxuriously blended and illustrated, as in these few words of sweetness and melody, where the author says of soft music —

" Oh, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet South
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour."

This is still finer, we think, than the noble speech on music in the Merchant of Venice, and only to be compared with the enchantments of Prospero's island; where all the effects of sweet sounds are expressed in miraculous numbers, and traced in their operation on all the gradations of being, from the delicate Ariel to the brutish Caliban, who, savage as he is, is still touched with those supernatural harmonies, and thus exhorts his less poetical associates —

" Be not afraid, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Would make me sleep again."——

Observe, too, that this and the other poetical speeches of this incarnate demon, are not mere ornaments of the poet's fancy, but explain his character, and describe his situation more briefly and effectually, than any other words could have done. In this play, and in the Midsummer Night's Dream, all Eden is unlocked before us, and the whole treasury of natural and supernatural beauty poured out profusely, to the delight of all our faculties. We dare not trust ourselves with quotations; but we refer to those plays generally — to the forest scenes in " As You Like it " — the rustic parts of the Winter's Tale — several entire scenes in Cymbeline, and in Romeo and Juliet — and many passages in all the other plays — as illustrating this love of nature and natural beauty of

* If the advocates for the grand style object to this expression, we shall not stop to defend it; but, to us, it seems equally beautiful, as it obvious and natural, to a person coming out of a lighted chamber into the pale dawn. The word candle, we admit, is rather homely in modern language, while lamp is sufficiently dignified for poetry. The moon hangs her silver lamp on high, in every schoolboy's copy of verses; but she could not be called the candle of heaven without manifest absurdity. Such are the caprices of usage. Yet we like the passage before us much better as it is, than if the candles were changed into lamps. If we should read, " the lamps of heaven are quenched," or " wax dim," it appears to us that the whole charm of the expression would be lost.

which we have been speaking — the power it had over the poet, and the power it imparted to him. Who else would have thought, on the very threshold of treason and midnight murder, of bringing in so sweet and rural an image at the portal of that blood-stained castle? —

> " This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his loved masonry that heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here. No jutting frieze,
> Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Has made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle."

Nor is this brought in for the sake of an elaborate contrast between the peaceful innocence of this exterior, and the guilt and horrors that are to be enacted within. There is no hint of any such suggestion — but it is set down from the pure love of nature and reality—because the kindled mind of the poet brought the whole scene before his eyes, and he painted all that he saw in his vision. The same taste predominates in that emphatic exhortation to evil, where Lady Macbeth says, —

> —— " Look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under it."

And in that proud boast of the bloody Richard —

> ——— " But I was *born* so high:
> Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,
> And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun."

The same splendour of natural imagery, brought simply and directly to bear upon stern and repulsive passions, is to be found in the cynic rebukes of Apemantus to Timon: —

> ——— " Will these moist trees
> That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip when thou point'st out? will the cold brook,
> Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste
> To cure thine o'er-night's surfeit?"

No one but Shakspeare would have thought of putting this noble picture into the taunting address of a snappish misanthrope — any more than the following into the mouth of a mercenary murderer: —

> " Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
> And in their summer beauty kiss'd each other."

Or this delicious description of concealed love into that of a regretful and moralising parent: —

> " But he, his own affections' Counsellor,
> Is to himself so secret and so close,
> As is the bud bit with an envious worm
> Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
> Or dedicate his beauty to the sun."

And yet all these are so far from being unnatural, that they are no sooner put where they are, than we feel their beauty and effect; and acknowledge our obligations to that exuberant genius which alone could thus throw out graces and attractions where there seemed to be neither room nor call for them. In the same spirit of prodigality he puts this rapturous and passionate exaltation of the beauty of Imogen into the mouth of one who is not even a lover: —

——— " It is her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus! the flame o' th' taper
Bows towards her! and would under-peep her lids
To see th' enclosed lights, now canopied
Under the windows, white and azure, laced
With blue of Heaven's own tinct — on her left breast
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
I' the bottom of a cowslip."

LORD LEVESON GOWER'S POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS.*

THE extremes of life, high and low, are more likely to comprise close resemblances in what form really the most important particulars of human character and conduct, than any other portion of the community. There is as much, and nearly the same danger in being above opinion as below it — in receiving a sugar-and-water education, as in receiving none at all — in the humours which follow from being underworked, overfed, and from false indulgences, as in the feverish exhaustion that accompanies overwork, underfeeding, and neglect. One of the main evils to which these extremes are alike exposed, and from which, one way or another, they suffer almost equally, is the want of sure regular employment. The difficulty, which the great must frequently experience in finding themselves in occupation, may be conceived by the envy with which such a man as even Dr. Johnson looked on persons who were brought up to a profession. Pride, Young says, was not made for man; leisure, we fear, quite as little. Notwithstanding Fox's favourite lines —

" How various his employments whom the world
Calls idle, and who justly, in return,
Esteems that busy world an idler too,"

our race is not sufficiently aërial to lead a gay uncankered life " under the blossom that hangs on the bough." The undertaking of our fine gentlemen to make a business of pleasure, answers much worse, they may depend upon it, than the opposite experiment of the industrious classes how far a pleasure may be made of business. The misery of conjugating that verb *ennuyer*, through any one of its hundred moods, and the apparent impossibility of providing the great vulgar, or the small, with respectable amusements, must dispose a reasonable person to look with much complacency on every attempt made by members of either class to extend their sphere of innocent enjoyment. Sufficient numbers for all the waste purposes of life are sure to be left behind. There are enow whom education and civilisation will never reach, and who, consequently, must remain in the station in which it has pleased God to place them, either the mere figurante figures, or the beasts of burden for society, — the prey for its sharpers, or company for its fools. Were a

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* 1. Translations from the German; and Original Poems. By Lord Francis Leveson Gower. 2. Faust, a Drama, by Goethe; with Translations from the German. By Lord F. L. Gower. 3. Wallenstein's Camp, from the German; and Original Poems. By Lord F. L. Gower. — Vol. lii. p. 231. October, 1830.

taste for literature to be valued only at its chance of affording some protection against degrading or destructive pleasures (the blandishments of the gaming table and the public house), it could never, even whilst thus negatively appreciated, either mount too high or descend too low. The cause of letters must gain something in the end. In the mean time, a solid advantage is gained to a still better cause; although our village minstrels should fail to give us any strain more powerful than that of Bloomfield and Clare, or although Byron's extinct volcano should find in the present generation of noble poets, no more bright and burning representative than scrawls of phosphorus rubbed into a sort of glimmer on a dark wall.

It has been rumoured lately, on high bibliopolist authority, that the rage for poetry is over. If verses can no longer be made so as to yield a remunerating price, professional dealers in them will turn their intellectual capital into some other line of business, and amateurs, who can afford to print although the gentle reader, and still more gentle purchaser, may not be forthcoming, will have Parnassus entirely to themselves. Notwithstanding any sneaking kindness we may feel for "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease," and who have married themselves to immortal verse for love, and not for money, it must be admitted that merely starving out one's competitors is not the most flattering species of success, if success can be predicated in a case where, by the supposition, the artists have withdrawn, and the public are become indifferent. In the mean time, it is evident that no great stream of national taste can suddenly change its channel without occasioning terrible distress. Considering what extensive manufactories of rhyme had been now, for many years, successfully established throughout the realm, and how completely "the inspiration of the poet's dream" were become subject to the ordinary laws of trade, it is melancholy to think on the necessary consequences of this supposed caprice of fashion. What a loss to unlucky publishers, whose floors are creaking under waste editions of condemned authors! — what a mournful prospect to veteran bards, at an advanced age, and without warning, to be thus suddenly thrown out of respectable employment! — what an embarrassment, as well as disappointment, to prudent fathers, and sanguine sisters, where the hopes of a whole family may have hung on the youthful genius whom they were bringing up a poet! — especially, since most other professions are already overflowing; not to mention that the spoiled children of the Muses lie under a traditional suspicion of not being easily convertible to the drudgery of daily prose. However, the evil * is temporary only, and we must struggle through it

* Locke's spirit will rejoice in this news. He seems to have got his notion of a poet from Lord Rochester, and to have dreaded the thoughts of one in a republic or private house, as much as could be ever done by either Plato or Lord Burleigh. His admiration of Sir Richard Blackmore, compared with whom, he says, "all our English poets, except Milton, have been mere ballad-makers," does not entitle his opinion, on the point of poetry itself, to much respect. It might also have been hoped, that his suggestion in behalf of a philosophic poem on the natural history of the universe would have inclined him to more forbearance. Whilst we think that he underrates the proficiency that pains-taking, without any genius, may give, we quite agree that the crop thus got is not worth the expenses of cultivation. It is wine made of out-of-doors grapes in England. We are equally satisfied, that a boyhood passed over a *Gradus ad Parnassum*, and metrical canons, is the surest way to secure having no crop at all. "If he has no genius to poetry, it is the most unreasonable thing in the world to torment a

as we can. We pity most the liberal booksellers who have speculated deeply in the three per cents. of poetry, and are large holders of a stock which will never charm "the leathern ears of stockbrokers or Jews." For the poets thus discountenanced, posterity will perhaps have little reason to regret the strangling of our "mute inglorious Miltons," the ebb and flow of whose imagination is duly regulated according as their golden couplets are at a discount or a premium in the London market. Let a poet arouse us from our sleep again, as with the first stanza of Branksome Hall, and we shall not fear.

In case the above complaint of the falling off in the demand for poetry should be duly verified by appropriate returns to parliament, specifying the amount of the different sorts of verse become unsaleable, and distinguishing the cases of the supernumerary writers necessarily discharged, tender compassion for their poorer brethren may move some one of our noble versificators to propose in their behalf a mitigated form of compensation, such as putting them on a list of deputy or supplemental laureats; or employing them under a vote of credit upon a public work—as some great national poem. Should Lord Leveson Gower propose a grant of public money for this purpose, the most wasteful application hitherto recognised, of the favourite doctrine of compensation, will scarcely cover the supposed emergency. The nation has been yet only required to indemnify the most vested interests when ruined by express enactment. Now, admirably calculated as have been the tactics of recent politics to destroy all romantic enthusiasm about public men, and lowering as the system must undeniably be found where all moral and intellectual pre-eminence, or even independence, seems an exclusion, it will never do, whilst Lord Leveson, himself a minister, is one of the most active of our poetical volunteers, to hold that government is officially responsible for any prosaic tendency in our age.

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child, and waste his time about that which never can succeed; and if he has a poetic vein, it is to me the strangest thing in the world, that the father should desire or suffer it to be cherished or improved. Methinks the parents should labour to have it stifled and suppressed as much as may be; and I know not what reason a father can have to wish his son a poet, who does not desire to have him bid defiance to all other callings and business; which is not yet the worst of the case, for if he proves a successful rhymer, and gets once the reputation of a wit, I desire it may be considered what company and places he is like to spend his time in, nay, and estate too; for it is very seldom seen that any one discovers mines of gold or silver in Parnassus. It is a pleasant air, but a barren soil; and there are very few instances of those who have added to their patrimony by any thing they have reaped from thence. Poetry and gaming, which usually go together, are alike in this too, that they seldom bring any advantage, but to those who have nothing else to live on. Men of estates almost constantly go away losers; and it is well if they escape at a cheaper rate than their whole estates, or the greatest part of them. If, therefore, you would not have your son the fiddle to every jovial company, without whom the sparks could not relish their wine, nor know how to pass an afternoon idly; if you would not have him to waste his time and estate to divert others, and contemn the dirty acres left him by his ancestors, I do not think you will much care he should be a poet, or that his schoolmaster should enter him in versifying. But yet, if any one will think poetry a desirable quality in his son, and that the study of it would raise his fancy and parts, he must needs yet confess, that, to that end, reading the excellent Greek and Roman poets is of more use than making bad verses of his own, in a language that is not his own. And he, whose design it is to excel in English poetry, would not, I guess, think the way to it were to make his first essays in Latin verses."—*Thoughts concerning Education.*

Whether the amateurs are not themselves called upon individually to do something handsome on such a crisis, is a different question; were it only to mark their sense of the liberality with which they have always been at once welcomed into the republic of letters. Most professions are guarded as strict monopolies, and are characterised by a feverish jealousy of honorary members. The lawyer, physician, and divine, have done their best to put down interlopers by positive prohibition. Brokers combine against a stranger, from the moment he enters into the auction room. The losses of a gentleman farmer are a favourite jest for his whole neighbourhood. This is not always mere selfishness; at least not pecuniary selfishness. Regular practitioners dislike to have their mystery invaded, and their learning cheapened down to a holiday accomplishment, — a lounging pursuit, which may be taken up and laid aside at pleasure. In addition to these objections, wealth is viewed by many with an ignorant, and almost proscribing envy. There are cynics who appear to derive a sort of consolation from the supposition that its shallow and coarse advantages are utterly incompatible with any process under which great endowments, and great qualities, are formed. *Stultitiam patiuntur opes*, is a disqualification which the rich are not to be allowed to master. This feeling is only another form of the malicious satisfaction with which some religionists have brooded over the difficulty "of going to heaven in a coach."

Men of letters are fortunately distinguished by the fact, that the descent of patrician competitors, from time to time, into their arena, has called forth none of this sour exclusive spirit. Plebeian genius, though dependent now on its new patron, the public only, seems still to retain a grateful recollection of the days when the dedication of a work was more profitable than the copyright of the work itself. Pope's spiteful forgery of "*Verses by a Gentleman of Quality*" is almost the only exception; whilst even he pretended to believe that Granville's Myra would live as long as his own Belinda. Notwithstanding the lecture which Lord Wilton has lately read us ungrateful commoners, the real risk of his order is still all the other way. Our modern Pisos want a Horace, even in these critical times, to tell them that the evil of their situation is much more that of being made ridiculous by absurd flattery, than that of being calumniated by unjust severity. Roscommon has indeed laid down a savage canon to the contrary, on which, however, no age ever acted. He presumed too much on his "unspotted bays," and might have himself accompanied the greater part of his writings to the stake, were any authority to be found for the solemn notice which he serves upon the English peerage, that, "degenerate lines degrade the attainted race."

> "I pity, from my soul, unhappy men
> Compell'd by want to prostitute their pen;
> Who must, like lawyers, either starve or plead,
> And follow, right or wrong, where guineas lead:
> But you, Pompilian, wealthy, pamper'd heirs,
> Who to your country owe your swords and cares,
> Let no vain hope your easy mind seduce,
> For rich ill poets are without excuse."

Now, our nobility never have been subject to these unequal terms, and set down to write as it were with a halter round their necks. Any such distinction might be reasonable enough, were bread the only want of man in his mortal state. Unfortunately, according to our original proposition, all are equally in want of amusement; and the amusing either others or ourselves, whom prosperity or accident have rendered unamusable, is

harder work than breaking stones upon any road. Most persons, too, would gladly acquire some sort of distinction beyond that which wealth and title (in a country where wealth and title are become too common to answer the ends of vanity) can of themselves bestow. The public seem to have, time out of mind, agreed to take this good-natured view of the case. Whilst every thing else in England is burdened with an apprenticeship, more or less tedious, poetry and politics have been considered to be exceptions. They have been left as a sort of open common, where those whom their rank excluded from the drudgery of professions, and long preliminary labour, might turn loose their imagination, either to bask in the sun, or gallop about, like unbroken colts, without an object; — and this upon a general understanding, always liberally construed, that these "Pompilian heirs" should be all the while under as little necessity of rendering rhyme or reason in explanation of such their proceedings, as the humblest of their fellow-creatures.

In the event of higher aspirations than mere amusement, it must be admitted, that "young ambition's ladder" will be found much easier climbing, than the steps that lead to the temple of the Muses. The poet can have no such aids and appliances as the aristocratical nature of our habits and institutions presents to juvenile politicians of noble birth. They commence their political life under circumstances, not of simple equality, but of great favour. One of the most practical purposes which the House of Commons is understood to serve, is that of an academy where the younger scions of the Upper House are to learn the trade of statesmen. Though many disadvantages attend the fact of parliament being the fashion, yet the general system must be singularly abused, either to vanity, interest, or spleen, before the public observation is roused, or its forbearance exhausted, by any particular example. It is only when the crowd of idle supernumeraries seem positively to embarrass the working of the ship; or on some flagrant instance of family jobbing, in the abuse of this peculiar patronage, which no custom can make any thing but a public trust; or upon a personal provocation, when genius is stung to speak its mind concerning some silken son of fortune, who is in the course of being "swathed, and rocked, and dandled into a legislator," that the general demand for reform singles out for indignation any individual case of this description. In the humbler days of the House of Commons, ere yet "its infant fortune came of age," it is thought to have been under great obligations to its incidental alliance with the aristocracy for its respectability and support. This is an obligation which it has long since repaid, and with usurious interest too. In respect of poetry (their other privileged amusement), it is also very clear, from the history of letters, that poets have done as much for the great, as the great have ever done for poets. Among the troubadours, and in our own early literature (ushered in as it was by Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney), there were splendid exceptions. But, as a general rule, the least acceptable and efficient form which the gratitude or munificence of the great ever assumed towards either poets or poetry itself, was the method, to which they have occasionally had recourse, of paying them in kind. The notion, once circulated in France, that poetry was indebted, among us, for its successful cultivation, to the patronage of the nobility and gentry, and more especially to their condescension in practising the same, is a pretension quite in character with the court of Louis XIV. "Il n'est point surprenant que la poësie soit portée si loin chez cette nation. Les premiers seigneurs ne dédaignent point de la cultiver. My Lord Roscommon, le Duc de

Buckingham, my Lord Dorset, et plusieurs autres personnes, nées dans le rang le plus élevé, ont fait des ouvrages, qui égalent les beaux morceaux des grands poëtes." (*Lettres Juives.*)

The period chosen as the flourishing era illustrated by such incomparable models, is decisive of the precise nature of the obligation with which our literature has, in this respect, in point of fact, been burdened. It is natural enough that a Frenchman should take it for granted, that the age of our national improvement must be contemporary with the introduction of French influence into the cabinets of our authors. How Pope was betrayed to give countenance to any such absurdity, by paraphrasing Horace's prettiness of *Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit*, with the direct statement, that an analogous effect was produced upon English literature by French models, is perfectly incomprehensible: —

> "We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms;
> Her arts victorious triumph'd o'er our arms."

In a note, he further explains his meaning by informing the reader, that about this time the Earl of Dorset, Mr. Godolphin, and others, together with Mr. Waller, translated the Pompey of Corneille, and "the more correct French poets began to be in reputation." If there is one fact more certain in our literary history than another, it is the fact, that the courtiers of Charles the Second set an example as injurious to the genius as to the morals of the English people. The French character, and colour which they gave to their compositions, never thoroughly amalgamated with the more free principle and natural movement of our great vernacular writers under Elizabeth, James, and Charles the First. It is difficult, on any other supposition, to account for the subsequent decay of poetical invention, and the dreary waste that Dodsley's Collections, and our Miscellanies, spread over so long a period, of which they are almost the standard works. Authors, apparently aware that they were not, as Spenser says, of child "with glorious great intent," refused to foster and present these bantlings as their own. Ashamed of a foreign and mongrel filiation, they stocked with them these repositories of careless literature, — the foundling hospitals of an age when albums and annuals were yet unknown. The notion that our literature, for upwards of a century, was sterilised by these uncongenial ingredients, which we wanted the power to assimilate or displace, seems confirmed by the new burst that our national poetry has made, and the vigorous leading shoots it has thrown forth, in our own time. The resurrection of English poetry coincides, to a day, with the overthrow of the conventional system — that worship of strange gods, idols of wood and stone, which had been imported among us from the heathen, by Lord Dorset and his fashionable companions. Precisely to the extent that we have replaced the models of home growth, and of older date, in the sanctuary, and have made them once more oracles of our belief, have we also found in them the inspiration of our genius.

We hope that the time is not far distant when somebody will try to give us a play of the old English school. Translations from the kindred school of Germany ought to act as introductions, as lessons, as appeals. Of all the hopeless attempts that ever entered into the wit of man, the most hopeless surely has been the attempt, in whatever hands, to naturalise the French drama on English soil. The enthusiasm of Napoleon for Corneille would have satisfied Madame de Sévigné, since he declared he would have made him his prime minister. Madame de Staël, though

looked on as a heretic by orthodox French critics, speaks of Racine as the greatest of all possible poets. Voltaire's tragedies, as more dramatic, and full of bolder movement, have their peculiar admirers. The right of every people to establish at home whatever form of poetry it may deem best adapted to its taste and circumstances, belongs to it, as a sovereign and independent state. It is a question so purely national, that the lectures which foreign critics frequently indulge in on such a subject, are usually only instances of unreasonable and impertinent interference, where fortunately, however, ink alone can be spilt, not blood. As foreigners, we consider ourselves perfectly incompetent to guess which way the capabilities of the French language and the turn of their national talent, will settle among themselves the literary insurrection which has been some time in progress against their ancient classical *régime*. But the evidence of nearly a century and a half, a considerable portion of which we were under the harrow of the experiment, ought to be received as proof that the beauties of the French theatre will not transplant into our own. Read Voltaire's praise of Cato, and his astonishment that a nation, in possession of such a treasure, could still tolerate Shakspeare. Yet, what is Cato? Or, what any one of the numerous dramas written in that sense, down to Sardanapalus? Or, take a favourite French tragedy, the one which has pleased us most in the closet, or with which we have been most affected in representation, and let us imagine it transformed into English, in the most workmanlike way that can be conceived, — such as Gray might have done, judging by his fragment, — yet how utterly distinct will be the most favourable impression it can in this shape produce upon us, from that of any tolerable specimen of the regular (or, if they choose it, irregular) English drama! There is no dispute over Europe of the merit of the smaller pieces of French extraction. They keep our half-price friends alive. The impassable differences of national taste recommence, we suspect, with the highest range of French comedy. The *Misanthrope*, for example, would seem, to an English audience, too much like so many pages of the *Caractères* of Bruyere, set in verse. Instead of that sort of pleasure we expect in a comedy, it affects us rather as a clever didactic poem, represented by the principal personages in one of Boileau's satires. However, the question, which we insist that experience has decided, by overruling the authority of the gentleman-reformers of our unpolished Saxon faith, and by affirming the impracticability of establishing any thing like a union between the theatres of Paris and London, is confined to tragedy only. Lord Leveson Gower has so far earned well of the republic, in that he has deserted the precedent of the translators of Pompey, and directed his attention to the German stage. It is pleasant to see the name of Gower* on the titlepage of a volume of modern verses; though the

* In case it should be Chaucer's epithet, "the moral Gower," which has frightened all but professed antiquarians, even from so tempting a title as the "*Confessio Amantis*," the following translation of a French ballad, written by him in his youth, will present him in a less formidable light: —

"To what shall I liken the month of May?
I'll call it Paradise — for there
The thrush never sang a divincr lay
'Mid fields more green, or buds more fair.
Nature is queen now everywhere;
And Venus calls lovers, away! away!
And none, when Love calls them, can now answer, nay.

name, indeed, is all that any Englisman, out of the Society of Antiquaries, pretends to know of a writer, at the mention of whom we all rise up with reverence, as to one of the traditional fathers of our poetry. It is only justice to Lord Leveson, to presume that he feels no criticism can be so affronting as that of vague unmerited compliment. Young ladies have learned to resent it as one of the worst pieces of impertinence. We will not pretend, therefore, to believe that he will preserve even the tradition of the name of a second Gower on the roll of English poets, unless he ceases to mix up poetry and politics together, and will devote himself more exclusively to the cultivation of the art. Apollo is a jealous god, and will not accept "the devil's leavings!"

The strength of our age is comparatively wasted, and the talents of many of those most justly eminent among us are frittered away, by coquetting with a hundred objects, instead of a wise preference and deliberate pursuit of one. The important truth that the liberal arts are related, and reflect light upon each other, is abused into a neglect of the still more necessary truth, that a division of labour and concentration of thought can alone enable the degree of intelligence possessed by man to produce any thing really and permanently great. As every body is now required to know every body, and, consequently, acquaintanceship is

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"Yet I must pluck nettles from 'neath the rose spray,
A chaplet meet for me to wear;
Since she, who alone can pour in the bright day
On my heart, pours in despair:
That heart these disdainings no longer will bear,
Whilst so humbly beseech'd, not a word will she say,
Though none, when Love calls them, can now answer, nay.

"Go, Ballad! plead my tender suit with care,
Fall at her feet, and gentle entrance pray;
Full well thou'st learn'd, and well thou canst declare,
None, when Love calls them, now should answer, nay."

The original is extracted, by Mr. Ellis, from about fifty MS. French ballads, attributed to him, which are now in the possession of the Marquess of Stafford. As Lord Leveson Gower takes so kindly to translation, it would be only a proper compliment to the possibility of their poetical relationship (only a few degrees less honourable than that of Spenser or Cowper) if he were to translate for us the remainder. Mr. Ellis observes, that these juvenile productions are more poetical, and more elegant, than any of his subsequent compositions in his native language, and exhibit "extraordinary proficiency in a foreigner." If Mr. Ellis could advance nothing stronger in behalf of the English language at that period, than that "it was certainly not quite unknown at court," it is not improbable that Gower may have felt himself equally at home in the use of what was scarcely a foreign tongue, until, from political motives, it became discountenanced by Edward the Third and his successors. Most likely, Gower learned both languages together; spoke one as often as the other; and wrote French much more frequently, like all children born or brought up in a country where the higher ranks adopt an idiom either of conquest or of fashion, and the lower remain obstinately faithful to their ancient tongue. Accordingly, of Gower's three principal works, one is in French, and another in Latin; and it was not till he was turned of fifty, that, commanded by Richard the Second to "book some new thing," he, for the first time, attempted the experiment, whether, in any other hands but those of Chaucer, the English language could be made sufficiently tractable and harmonious for verse.

displacing friendship out of the world, so, the ambition of being supposed to be acquainted with every thing, can only end, under the most favourable circumstances, in the knowing a little of every thing, and a great deal of nothing; whilst, in ordinary cases, it must degenerate into a washy, bold, and ephemeral facility. The gratification of personal vanity in this apparent versatility of talent, is paid for dearly by the public in the superficial performance of almost every thing which every body so intrepidly undertakes. Probably no contingency which could have arrived to Lord Leveson Gower subsequent to the day of his nativity, would have made him either a great statesman or a great poet. But it is almost a certainty that if he had not dabbled so continuously in rhyme, he would not have earned the reputation of being the worst Irish secretary in the memory of man, and pretty nearly the worst official speaker, even in a ministry of which Mr. Goulburn and Mr. Herries are members. On the other hand, if he had abstained from the interruption that the necessary routine of office must create, even in the imagination of the most business-like of poets, it is almost impossible that a more abundant leisure and a severer self-criticism would not have either improved many of his verses, or at least withheld him from appealing to the public for its opinion on their merit.

The fact of Lord Leveson Gower's possible existence as a poet, seems to demand a few preliminary observations. The question is of some importance, as it concerns no less a matter than existence, and involves indeed many others besides himself. The Romans, who got their taste and their rules in literature second-hand, have passed on almost as proverbs the declaration that there can be no such thing as middling poetry; with the additional axiom, that a poet must be born one, *nascitur, non fit.* Looking at a good deal of that which the ancients have preserved for us under the name of poetry, and which (independently of their specific approbation) may be assumed to be better than what was allowed to perish, it is impossible not to admit that the practice of antiquity fell considerably short of the absolute standard thus magnificently announced. Unless the moderns are understood, in many of their poetical verdicts, to have taken the question of law as well as of fact into their hands, it is equally clear that we have eat out the heart and substance of the rule altogether, by some most sophistical construction. But, in truth, this celebrated dictum rests on nothing more profound than the gratuitous assertion of its inventors and retailers. No reason can be assigned why the theory in this instance, as in others, should not be made to correspond with what appears to be the fact as regards the subject matter, and why the same degrees and distinctions should not be acknowledged to exist in poetry as avowedly exist in prose. It is not more true in the case of poetical talent than in that of other kinds of intellectual superiority, that occasionally it is so peculiar and determined as to discover its appropriate destination along with the earliest developement of its power. This is what is meant by having a genius for any particular art or science. Among human enthusiasts, poets must not flatter themselves that they only have a call. Horace represents it as being in his time a debated question, whether poets owed more to nature than to art. It might have been assumed, one should think, that there can be no comparison between the poet of God's making and of man's. It is this supposed pre-eminence which really constitutes the only evidence we can possess of his divine mission. Yet it will not follow that, from the highest conceivable excellence, there may not be a descending scale of imagination, passion,

taste, down to the lowest point at which the last possible element of the poetical character shall have disappeared. Throughout every intermediate gradation, these endowments may be, in some faint degree, supplied by an assiduous contemplation of the works of genius, and by an endeavour to make up, by means of learning, elegance, and correctness, the comparative parsimony of nature. These two characters were perhaps never so strongly marked, so exclusively preserved, and so high an extreme of excellence attained respectively under each, as in those illustrious contemporaries, Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. If Shakspeare was solely the unparalleled gift of this prodigal nature, Ben Jonson was almost as solely the laborious work of indefatigable art. It is evident that he collected in his own way for his plays as Sir Hans Sloane did for his museum, and then fitted in his specimens like a worker in mosaic.

We shall never dispute the incomparable superiority of the first of these great divisions. In its highest perfection it will also frequently find an apprenticeship under the second as much of an encumbrance as an aid. Even Milton's learning is a train that often nearly throws him down. Holding Democritus's opinion, that a real poet must be a little mad, we suspect that what is called a regular classical education, after the fashion of Porson and of Blomfield, would be the greatest injury as well as torment which could befall him; and that the superintendence of a true Aristotelian critic (Bentley, for instance, as his literary keeper) must be enough to drive him mad outright. Not but that it is necessary to keep some method in this madness, and give it a right direction. Unluckily, a London saloon is not the most favourable scene for the encouragement and cultivation of that sort of aberration from the commonplaces of life and understanding, which constitutes originality of character and independent thought. A great poet is an accident which the world has so seldom seen in any period of civilisation, and in any rank of life, that he must be taken as the rarest combination of the human faculties. Were he born in the higher classes, the risk would be considerably increased of his being spoiled some way or other in his bringing up. The world, it is possible, might be able to unmake that which it could have never made. Consequently, on an arrangement of successful poets into two divisions — that of natural genius, and that of accomplished taste — we should expect to find among the aristocracy fewer of the first, and more of the second, than their bare numerical proportion. When we come to this second description of poetry, to be sure a very little natural talent will go a long way. It need only be taken up betimes as a gentlemanly amusement, and persevered in with ordinary parts and pains. In that event, we can almost undertake to promise any young nobleman, so disposed, that he shall acquire a sufficient degree of manual dexterity to make versifying as agreeable as billiards on a rainy morning. Nay more, that he shall be enabled to keep up externally such a specious poetical appearance as cannot fail to obtain him credit for the reality, to any extent, with that portion of the public whom we are surprised to see Lord Leveson hitch into irreverent rhyme — "female cousins and maiden aunts."

Lord Leveson began betimes, and has persevered. Here are three volumes — of which the first contains, together with a few translated from the German, some poems that were written for, but did not obtain, the prize at Oxford. Considering that successful prize poems are the most tiresome reading in our literature, the publication of unsuccessful ones is a gratuitous humiliation, which few confessors would have the barbarity to impose upon a penitent, in expiation for the errors of his youth. It

must be supposed, therefore, that our author's judgment on the scale of university taste in such matters, is all one with that of the saucy academician, who justified the badness of a poem, composed for one of these occasions, on the express ground of having adapted his performance to the level of his tribunal. The second volume consists principally of a translation of Goethe's Faust; the last, of Wallenstein's Camp. Among the original poems, that on a fête given at Boyle Farm is a favourable specimen of *vers de société*. All the other experiments at original composition unfortunately are on subjects where the expression of sentiment and of poetical imagery of a higher character is required. The choice of the measure, and the imitation of Lord Byron's manner, in the "Moravian Tale" and the "Drachenfels," are additionally injudicious by the comparison thus immediately provoked. There is a copy of verses on a soldier's funeral, which, being printed twice over, is apparently a favourite with its author. A funeral is not more the proper place for a clever saying than for a droll one; at least, if our feelings are expected to be kept in harmony with the affecting solemnity of the scene. Considerable wit, it may be admitted, is implied in the discovery of the remote resemblance which is found to exist in things at first sight so distinct as a war-horse in its funereal trappings, and an orphan proud of its new mourning. But Donne, or Cowley, or Blackmore, could scarcely have mistaken the surprise of such a comparison for a stroke of the pathetic: —

"Upon the coffin's sable lid they placed
His gleaming helmet and his battle blade,
And slow behind his raven charger paced,
Reft of the hand whose rule he once obey'd.

"His mien was like an orphan child's, whose mind
Is yet too young a parent's loss to know,
Yet, conscious of a change, appears to find
A strange importance in his weeds of woe."

Spenser, though not Irish secretary, has left us a valuable Report on the state of Ireland. Instead of any dry official legacy of that description, Lord Leveson has taken leave of Ireland with the poetical compliment of "Lines on a Visit to Castle Connell Rapids, near Limerick, September 1829." They are written upon the conceit of an analogy not quite so novel in its principle as that just noticed, but which makes up what it may want in novelty, by the minuteness of the detail into which the parallel is run. This lengthened simile consists of the resemblance which the stream of the Shannon in this part of its course, with "a bark careering past," bears to the stream of human life, with our friends upon it. There is some comfort in the assurance given us, that if we borrow an hour for the purposes this meditation may demand, the loan is one which we shall not have to repay with sorrow. Meanwhile, it would have been more satisfactory if the loan had been repaid us in coin more substantial and intelligible than the concluding stanza: —

"Some barks may steal the bank along,
And the mid stream decline;
But life has lent its current strong
And roughest aid to mine.
The castled steep, the terraced vine,
The scenes where art and nature vie
The weary wanderer to arrest,
To bid him linger and be blest —

From these, scarce seen, condemn'd to part,
With wistful eye and aching heart,
I still must wander by;
And, sport of fortune's wildest wave,
Pursue the stream I cannot brave."

What can all this gentlemanlike melancholy mean? Are we right in conjecturing that the Irish secretary wanted to make a tour of pleasure, but was required by "the rough aid" of the Duke of Wellington to make a tour of business instead? — that he consequently was condemned to wander by the "terraced vines" of many an Irish cellar, without stopping to partake their proverbial hospitality? — and that, lastly, nothing but the "sport of fortune's wildest wave" could have made him secretary for Ireland? The allegorical figure of pursuing a stream which one cannot brave, may be perhaps intended as a type of the conduct (system or policy it has none) of the Irish administration. This conduct has indeed been latterly described to us as a mere waiting on the stream of public opinion in Ireland, without once attempting to stem or to control it by a moral influence, to the possession or exercise of which it would in truth have been ludicrous to pretend. "The Rapids," we fear in this respect, may represent in some degree, however faintly, the present prospects of society in Ireland. The eddies (however they may have been raised by *agitation*, yet) lie too deep in natural causes of almost every description, to have subsided. They are, on the contrary, hurrying on with a velocity and power that does indeed require a resolute government to brave, and an intelligent one to guide, the torrent. But this is a state of things far too serious for metaphors. Concessions so long withheld — agitation so long continued, had necessarily turned Ireland (men, women, and children) into a population of politicians. Emancipation staved off, and could only stave off, its own immediate crisis. The other causes of disquietude and discontent, which must always swarm in such a country, will soon assume a fearful magnitude, unless they are wisely, humanely, and vigorously examined, relieved, and resisted, according as in every case the public interest may demand. There can be no greater sign than the election of Mr. Wyse for Tipperary, of the real moral revolution which has taken place there; or of the comprehensive sagacity and personal vigilance which the government of Ireland requires.

Pope tells us, that, partly in satire and partly in good-nature, he was accustomed to advise those contemporary poets whose natural genius he mistrusted, to translate. Is translation, then, so easy a matter? Did he himself find it so? It is undoubtedly an advantage to a translator that he has the ideas found for him to his hand ready made. However, in the highest works of every kind of art, the mere thought is only the first step. It is one that is indispensable indeed; but not more so than a great deal else. The restraint of being obliged to reproduce this indentical thought, in as nearly as possible the same shape as the author had first produced it, comes often to more than its prime cost, and more than it is at all in reason worth. It may be worth while shortly to enquire what are the principal considerations which embarrass this problem. In any given case, the greater the approximation that can be obtained towards similarity of mind or fellow-feeling between an author and his translator, assuredly so much the better chance for this indentity being preserved. We wish, therefore, that Dryden had undertaken Homer, and Pope, Virgil. Heber gave up the translation of *The Messiah*,

" from a real doubt how far we may venture to attribute to so awful a Being, at such a moment, words and actions of our own invention." Otherwise, there is so strong a personal resemblance between Heber and Klopstock, not only in devotional spirit and blameless purity of mind, but in the sweet and flowing character of their genius, that it will be long before we may hope for another translator so appropriately designated for the task. This similarity can, indeed, be had but seldom. Men of original genius choose to ride their own horse, and to set up on their own account. At first sight, the necessities of translation would seem *absolutely* to require little more than a susceptibility to the differences of style and character in composition, together with a power of successful imitation. Yet, will experience warrant this conclusion? The profusion of parodies with which literature has been infested, and the compass of mimicry of this description displayed in works of the nature of the *Rejected Addresses*, prove that, up to a certain point, these qualifications are by no means either very valuable or very rare. The paucity of tolerable translations, on the other hand, can only be accounted for by supposing that some far scarcer talent is wanted, or that there is often some inherent impracticability in the task, of a kind for which sufficient allowances have not been always made. Of course, the more natural and more varied the style of any author may chance to be, in the first case the less mechanical peculiarity will there be to catch; and in the second, the more improbable will it be that the imitative skill of the copyist should enable him equally to catch all. In parodies, the buffoon is helped by our ill nature — he selects the passages whose mannerism most assorts with his monkey talent, and he has an almost indefinite license of caricature. Instead of any latitude of this sort, the translator is bound, throughout a work of whatever length, to severe expectations, and exacting terms. The likeness, as looked for at first, is almost that of a reflection in a mirror. The difference in these conditions, is difference enough. But the great and decisive distinction lies in the fact, that imitation altogether evades the chief obstacle which translation has to overcome. This obstacle consists in the change from one language to another.

Because words seem but the clothes in which thoughts are dressed, it does not follow that thoughts may be put into a new language, and that it is only like a man putting on a new coat. A national costume is indeed no trifle: but this comes to much more than disarming, as it were, the idea and the substitution of vulgar broadcloth for the tartan plaid. The secret power of a language is frequently as undefinable as it is intransmittible. We are speaking now of the general effect produced by a whole language — as the creation and representative of national character; not of that exquisite grace of expression, which, in the case of certain writers, has always been felt and admitted to be as personal and as impossible to be copied as the charm of individual manners. The language of a nation becomes its atmosphere — its own breath is in it. Ariosto in English verse (Mr. Rose will excuse us) must always be out of place, and have something wanting. If Lord Bristol had managed to get every stone of the Temple of Vesta safe to Ickworth, the best part of it would still have been left behind, in that which is irremovable and incommunicable — the beautiful accompaniments of its ancient glory and Italian sky. So far, therefore, as any language is impressed more or less strongly with a characteristic individuality, the immediate sacrifice made, in this respect, is of a nature which no possible ability in a translator can

supply. There is an evaporation that cannot be prevented. The spirit is gone out of it on the stranger's touch. This must be positively and universally true, whatever is the other language. Such is the sacrifice which consequently is found to be, to a certain extent, unavoidable in all cases. In any given case, it must further vary with the degree of relationship (whether in descent, principle, colouring, or other often inexplicable association) which may subsist between the language from, and the language into, which the translation is to pass. According as the genius of two tongues approaches or recedes from each other, this specific difficulty will, on all ordinary occasions, diminish or increase. A comparison, thus instituted, will therefore determine the loss which will be likely to attend the transfer, or selling, as it were, out of one, and buying into the other. Lastly, in proportion as the peculiar excellencies of an author depend more exclusively on idiomatic felicity and niceties of expression, the difficulty of the undertaking rises towards an impossibility.

We will illustrate these several cases shortly. Under the first, can we be mistaken in mentioning the name of Homer? or is the change really in ourselves? can it be possible that another dialect might do as well as that of early Greece, were we ourselves only but made young again, — what we were when borne along the proud hexameters of "the blind old man of Scio's rocky isle," as on the waves of his Ægean Sea? It surely not all the mere redolence of youth: nor can we err in mainly attributing the untranslatableness of Homer to the unrivalled and unapproachable nationality by which the Homeric Greek appears to be so wonderfully distinguished. Like the song of Sion, it refuses to be sung in a strange land. In this experiment, Pope and Cowper have tried the two extremes of opposite systems. Scholars will agree only in the result, namely, that the real and genuine Iliad is equally lost in both. The character of its scenery seems entirely changed; stripped bare in one — gilded over in the other. However admirably particular passages may be rendered, there is an alteration introduced, fatal to the impression of the whole. A botanist's herbal may preserve small specimens; but no exotic, truly and grandly such, can be naturalised in its native magnificence. The palm-tree in our climate, whether it were petted artificially in a hot-house, or whether it could struggle into a stunted existence out of doors, would not be the palm tree of the East. Thus, the romantic poets (poets of the same class) have a rural and matin air about them belonging to the dayspring of society, which can be neither prolonged nor restored. Until we can call back the freshness of the morning breeze, the same objects looked at with the rising sun gleaming on them, or under the general glare of noon, will no longer be the same. Dryden's imitations of Chaucer, — Pope's imitations of Donne, are in fact translations from an early into a later language. In satire, the effect is not so perceivable; But in the first of these instances, an impediment may be supposed to be insurmountable, which Dryden has only surmounted by the substitution of matchless beauties of his own! He wins his cause, like Phryne pleading before the Areopagus. *

* The principle which renders the language of different countries or periods, when distinctly marked, an inadequate instrument for conveying a correct idea of each other by translation, very much agrees with the spirit of the elegant discourse by Jacobs on the dialects of Greece. After observing on the singular perfection to which so many distinct dialects were brought, he enquires how it came to pass,

The comparative history of languages, and a cursory enquiry into the list of approved translations which have been made from each to each, furnish abundant proof that this literary exchange is carried on much more extensively, and on a much more advantageous footing, between some countries than others. A mere examination of their dictionaries will not explain this; any more than the weighing or pronouncing the names of Cæsar and of Cassius will testify on the merits or the fortunes of those who bore them. No doubt, a philosophical explanation of all these distinctions might be rendered, in case we had but the appropriate facts in elucidation of the origin and formation of the respective languages sufficiently in detail before us. But, without waiting for so unlikely a revelation, the waste of a great deal of valuable labour might have been spared, if this truth had been practically attended to. The fact that the poetry of one language has been well translated into some other, is, without more, no authority for the inference that it will submit to this process in our own. The difference between the capabilities of languages in copying from each other the same subject with accuracy and effect, may be greater than the comparative powers of representation, between a picture and the engraving from it, or even than between the same representation in colours and in marble.

It must, however, further be observed, that the character of no language is so fixed and stereotyped, but that the degree of its individualisation depends a good deal in every instance on the character of the person using it. The most vernacular dialect possible may be generalised, under an artificial style, till it is made any and every language, or rather none at all, and shall want no further translation than the construing of the words. The same consequence may follow from a higher cause, and in more sturdy hands. The language, that is, the material used, becomes a matter comparatively indifferent in the case of a writer who relies almost entirely for his effect upon energy of thought, or a sort of strong sense plainly and vehemently expressed. Thus we have three or four excellent translations of Juvenal; and every nation of Europe might have, whenever it thinks fit, as many as it chooses. On the other hand, a great master of his native tongue will so far make it his own, as to find in it, or give it, peculiar properties of power or sweetness which it was never suspected to possess. There are in the literature of the world no more striking instances of this mastery over language, than the tractable ease and softness into which Terence and Horace brought so unmalleable a speech as that of Rome—whose iron substance might have been constructed by the Appian family, as well as their own everlasting way. Terence

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that a particular dialect was, in such distant places, and for such a length of time, exclusively set apart for particular compositions. Reasons are assigned, why the nature of man is supposed to have unfolded itself in Greece more naturally, gradually, and perfectly, through the successive stages of childhood, youth, and manhood, than is evidenced in the literature of any other country. And accordingly, whilst the Æolic and Doric dialects represent the lyric feelings of a later growth, and the Attic dialect the manly combinations of a still more advanced age, the flexible and imaginative Ionic, varying with, and sensible to, the vivid impressions of external nature, became the natural organ of the poetical Heroic Age. As the Rhapsodies of Homer are the great example of Epic Poetry, so Herodotus, although of Dorian descent, is conceived to have adopted Ionic Prose as the most fitting record for that most Epic History of *naïve* and picturesque society.

breathed into it a new colloquial elegance, and Horace a winning grace almost inconceivable—that *vultus nimium lubricus aspici* of bright expression, which makes the fascination of his Odes. An attempt at translating them—at leading them, as it were, in chains to grace an English triumph, can be made only in the glorious ignorance with which the conqueror of Corinth threatened the supercargo, who had charge of the plundered miracles of art for the Roman Louvre, that whatever was damaged must be replaced. Dryden's Paraphrases are the nearest and only approximations. The things themselves will not bear removal. Like delicate wines, whose flavour perishes if carried beyond their native vineyard, you must drink them on the spot. Of all writers, it would appear, therefore, that none are more entitled than successful translators to the credit of *la difficulté surmontée*. However, not looking upon this as so absolute a criterion of the merit of poetry as is the habit of our neighbours on the other side of the Channel, we have been accustomed to consider the translations of long poems as rather thankless undertakings. In nine cases out of ten they give a very deficient, and indeed delusive, idea of their original; and in none can they give so perfect a ropresentation, but that, if a long poem is indeed worth reading, it is worth while to learn the language in which it was composed. No substitute can answer the purpose. Charles the Fifth's redomontade in encouragement of linguists, that a man was worth as many more men just in proportion to the number of languages he knew, is a Quixotical exaggeration. But it may be safely said, that the language of every people contains the truest revelation of its character:—also, that the best part of beauty, of every kind, has something about it too evanescent and mysterious to be transmitted by any expedient of art. In the human countenance, it is that which no portrait—as, in poetry, it is that which no translation—can ever give.

Applying our principles to the case before us, what is the result? If there is no special evidence in confirmation, there is nothing to raise a suspicion that our general theory should be changed. Various and yet peculiar as is the German language, nevertheless its roots, connections, and sympathies, are so intertwined with that of England, that from amidst the numerous attempts now making in poetical translations, we would back the translators from the German against the field. We are, indeed, disappointed in the present instance. By some mistake or caprice, Lord Leveson appears to us to have generally selected subjects not at all suited to his power. There are exceptions. Among the smaller poems, of those whose merit principally consists in their spirit, some are rattled off with very considerable effect, like a piece of noisy music;—two or three of Körner's especially. His "Song of the Sword," written a few hours before the battle where he fell, brought back to our thoughts Leyden's "Address to his Malay Krees," written whilst a French privateer was pursuing them off Sumatra. But Körner's verses are as much superior to those of our Oriental scholar, as the inspirations of patriotism over those of simply fearless valour might be expected and ought to be. Again, there are occasionally a few conversational couplets scattered up and down the dramatic dialogues, very smartly and cleverly done. But our real opinion on the two principal translations must of course be determined by the impression that the whole produces. As translations of a whole, however spirited in parts, they are decided failures. The degree to which they are failures, we can explain on no other supposition than that they have been taken easy, as the playthings of an idle after-

noon. This appears also more probable from there being here and there such obvious mistranslations as seem incompatible with the fact, that the text was corporally and seriously under the translator's eye at the time he was turning it into rhyme. By a little more care, Wallenstein might be improved exceedingly. If Faust is translatable at all — which we almost doubt — there can be no doubt that Lord Leveson is not the pre-appointed instrument for that most arduous literary achievement.

The boldness is more to be admired than the discretion which could lead any one, for a trial of strength, to the choice of Faust. It is a sort of monster in literature; — redeemed only as a work of art by the prodigious hardihood displayed in its invention, and by the marvellous ease of its execution. Redeemed in a better sense we cannot say it is. Notwithstanding the omission of sundry objectionable passages, the immoral tendency of the design and incidents is so ground into the whole substance of the work, that the selection of it for the exercise of his talents must negative whatever claim Lord Leveson might otherwise bring forward to the proverbial epithet of his poetical namesake. It is a book which Lord Eldon would assuredly outlaw at once. The story is, in plain English, neither more nor less than the adventures of a German Student, who, having overread himself into weariness and disappointment, quits his books for life and nature, by turning debauchee, and seducing a servant-maid. The poetical machinery, by which a subject so unpromising is worked up into one of the most extraordinary Dramas in existence, turns on a bargain between God and the Devil; the terms of which are, that the luckless Professor is to be surrendered up, after the example of Job, to the temptations of Satan in his immortal character of Mephistopheles. This bargain the said Professor afterwards confirms in his own person, by a deliberate sale of himself to the Devil, who makes his first appearance in the shape of a poodle dog. The remainder of the poem consists of the half-reluctant and half-penitent apprenticeship which Faust, whilst nominally the master, is really serving to his diabolical companion. The human incidents, thus moralised or diabolised, are simple enough; but their effect is widely diversified with poetry, profaneness, and demonology, in an infinite variety. We are hardened against the consequences of books in England; but in a country where a book is said to be received as a fact, we should dread this splendid sneer on the imbecility, vanity, and hypocrisy, of human learning and human virtue. If young men take to the road, on the authority of The Robbers, commit suicide because they find a precedent in Werther, many a lecture-room in a German University, among the various causes under which they occasionally blow up, may set down Faust for a principal element of explosion. Faust appears to us, both in its matter and manner, the extreme compound of German genius and German extravagance. Is it likely that any one but an English Goethe should find the magic style, &c. which could popularise so supernatural, and at the same time so familiar, a fiendish fiction among us? There are some remarkable fragments of it by Bysshe Shelley. But Goethe has combined in the several parts of this strange production, examples of every species of his boundless talents — Shakspearian imagination — the obscene caustic scepticism of Bayle or Gibbon — the cold and flippant irony of Voltaire. If the author of Cain and Manfred might have done justice to the bitter and sublime remonstrances against God and Nature, yet the author of Don Juan could scarcely have preserved the intermingling shades — now strokes of coarse buffoonery — now touches of light and playful humour. The

simplicity of its deep and natural tenderness, it is clear, he could not have maintained at all.

The poetry, of course, is the chief compensation which will support an English reader, and carry him through these chambers of incongruous imagery, and among scenes more uncouth and incomprehensible than the temptations of St. Anthony, to the points of brightness and of rest. Now poetry is the very part in which Lord Leveson is the most feeble. He seems often to be in Audrey's condition: "I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?" We have room to refer only to the beautiful lines prefixed as in Goethe's own person to the prologue of Faust. They are either diluted into vague abstractions, or weakened by the substitution of an artificial and ornamental phraseology, instead of his own sweet and natural expression. There is nothing in the original about "the breast of age being fervid to the last," about "fountains of unbidden tears," or vanished friends "cheering the gloom of intellectual night," or that "to cheerless seas my streams must roll along," or that

> "All which gave my maiden muse her grace,
> Fades and evaporates into empty space;"

or that "o'er his frame a pleasing frenzy strays," or any thing about a resignation of her reign by cold reality. The English, compared with the German, is like a milliner's rose taken out of a bandbox, crisp and scentless, and placed opposite the morning rose blushing on its native stalk. Further, in regard to the nature of the substituted ornaments, there may be a necessity for adopting false ringlets, but there can be none for putting powder in them. The liberties freely taken with the letter of the text, ought to have been justified by some corresponding advantage. No one expects, in the case of poetry, the close precision of an interpreter of evidence in a court of justice. On many, indeed most occasions, it may be impossible to literally transfer from one language to another a burst of tender feeling, and to retain line for line the power and simplicity of the first creation. But in this case and elsewhere, as often as the materials of two idioms do not admit of this strict conversion, the talents of a translator are tried by the adopted means to which he has recourse. He should make it "stuff o' the conscience" to remember that the slightest variation from the words and meaning, style and spirit, of his author, is a *primâ facie* offence, for which he must render an account. It will be justifiable or excusable, manslaughter or murder, as the case may be.

Schiller is a much easier writer to deal with than Goethe; inasmuch as he is original, yet always belongs to the common classical school of Europe. There is something very natural, but quite new, in the design of Wallenstein. The fatal period comprised in it is short — that of the double conspiracy — his own against the Emperor, and the Emperor's against himself. It is broken up into three successive parts — Wallenstein's Camp, the Piccolomini, and Wallenstein's Death; forming in the whole a *trilogue* which, we suspect, Athens never surpassed. Being thus circumscribed, it has none of the narrative and annalist character of one of Shakspeare's historical plays. Nor does it attempt the progressive growth of a passion, like ambition, driven on by its imperious instinct, as in the tragedies of Miss Baillie, or developed under the fatal temptation of circumstances beckoning on, as in Macbeth. Yet the effect of much of this panoramic view of contemporary life, as well as of the glimpses down the interminable vista of the human heart, is admirably combined.

This, it appears to us, is principally owing to the singular skill with which the first part is managed, so as to seem painted in, like a grand Background and Horizon to the remainder of the piece. Coleridge's * splendid, but very unequal, paraphrase of the two latter parts, has made the most ordinary reader of English poetry well acquainted with them. But his reader sees them to great disadvantage, deprived of the depth and colouring (the condensed and gathering storm) which it was the express object of this bold dramatic preface to work up, and to hang like a dark electric cloud over the principal plot and personages, when they were subsequently brought upon the stage.

This omission Lord Leveson has now supplied, by the translation of the introductory part, called Wallenstein's Camp. The duty required of the ancient prologue was little more than just that amount of information, in the form almost of an advertisement, concerning the parties and their previous story, which should make the *medias res* intelligible, without beginning at the beginning. Shakspeare, it is true, has found a much more truly poetical use for the prologue, than occurred to any of the ancients, in that beautiful opening to Henry V. By this means, combined with the brilliant choruses from time to time so vividly interposed, Shakspeare has there not only thrown a very sufficient bridge over the loose and crumbling chasm, which the breach of unity of time and place, it must be confessed, often awkwardly creates, but has kept up throughout a dramatic breadth and power, that it would seem otherwise impossible to give to the scattered incidents of a campaign. The first of these objects Schiller did not want. On the preliminary plan which he has here devised, he prepares and accomplishes the second in a more extensive form, and with greater theatrical effect. Schlegel considers Henry V. as Shakspeare's favourite hero. Accordingly, some of the camp-scenes in that play have the same design as that with which Wallenstein's Camp is so skilfully planned — the portraying the devotion of an army towards its victorious leader. By separating this part of his subject, and marshalling it in advance, this precise object is as distinctly attained by Schiller:

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* We have too long admired Mr. Coleridge as having about him a vein of the true poet — one of Democritus's sort — not to be aware that it is out of the question to expect he should "peruse and settle" his translation, like the draft of a conveyance, or we should have much to say to him thereon. However, on one occasion — Thekla's Song — he expresses himself so dissatisfied with his version, that he gives in the note another experiment by a friend. Is he, in truth, better satisfied with that? In that case, with less diffidence — but in any case, with the spirit in which a peasant offers a basket of apples to a wealthy neighbour — we beg to tender him the refusal of a third. He has claimed, or at least exercised, so much more extensive rights over the text, that we do not feel it necessary to apologise for "the Blossom on Earth's Tree," as being *novas Frondes, et non sua Poma*, unless he should consider that the ingrafted slip is out of character with the parent stem.

> "The clouds are flying, the woods are sighing,
> The Maiden is walking the grassy shore,
> And as the wave breaks with might, with might,
> She singeth aloud through the darksome night,
> But a tear is in her troubled eye.
>
> "For the world feels cold, and the heart gets old,
> And reflects the bright aspect of Nature no more;
> Then take back thy child, Holy Virgin, to thee!
> I have pluck'd the one blossom that hangs on earth's tree;
> I have lived — and have loved — and die."

and with these advantages, there is no necessity afterwards for interrupting the regular course of the principal plot, and interposing a new class of *dramatis personæ* simply for that which, although most important, is yet a collateral purpose. Having set aside a portion of his canvass for a grand military picture, he got also room enough to do justice to a subject perfectly unique, as he has treated it, and which must otherwise have been pushed into a corner.

Wallenstein's Camp, taken by itself, is a more vivid sketch of a soldier's life than a battle by Wouvermans, a campaign by Callot, or a Cossack and his horse by Vernet. We do not wonder that, when it was acted at Berlin, on the opening of one of their campaigns, shouts of enthusiasm from the assembled officers burst from every corner of the house. It is strange that, after mentioning this incident, Madame de Staël should be still so much in bondage to the prejudices of Paris, as to call a piece of such irresistible excitement a burlesque — the reason of this being, to all appearance, nothing more or less than that the *dramatis personæ* are taken every one of them out of the lower classes — the peasant, the sutler's wife, the quibbling capuchin, the recruit, and the private soldiers. To put the soul of poetry into the coarse enjoyments of common life is no ordinary triumph. The Beggar's Bush or Opera of Burns, is a greater effort of genius than many lyrics. But more than this, Schiller has thrown a dash of heroism, as well as the light of imagination, over these humble groups. The French revolution, it is said, "has brought out a new hero, the greatest of all, — the people." It is impossible, whilst these bold adventurers are comparing notes, and in the earnestness of proud and gay contention unbosoming their feelings, not to acknowledge, that in the camp and the day of battle the ranks of an army contain its thousands who have every thing of heroism equal with their captains, excepting epaulettes and fame. Mere mechanical command on one side, and obedience as mechanical on the other, are poor distinctions. The stronger this conviction — yet, when one looks as from a height, on a scene such as Schiller here presents to us, and sees the streams from a thousand hills brought down at one man's bidding to meet in the same channel and rush forward — one and the same wave — we bend, with all around us, before the power and predominance of a single mind. Such seem to have been Hannibal, Wallenstein, and Napoleon, surrounded by their troops.

> " Upon the gloomy background of this scene —
> A bold attempt of an undaunted spirit —
> A desperately daring man is painted.
> You know him, him the raiser up of hosts,
> Crime's worshipp'd idol, and the scourge of kingdoms —
> The Emperor's prop, and object of his fear;
> Fortune's adventurous son, who, borne aloft
> Upon the fav'ring influence of the time,
> On honour's loftiest summit placed his foot,
> And, still unsatisfied, his course pursuing,
> A victim to untamed ambition fell?
> Not he the pageant of our scene to-night.
> Yet, mid the ranks of those his orders lead,
> His spirit and his dimly-shadow'd form
> Will walk in union."

This translation is meant, we presume, as a sort of installation ode on Lord Leveson Gower's appointment to the War Office. We doubt whether Mr. Hume will receive it as a part payment on account. But it

may become popular at the Horse Guards, and with military bands. There is certainly considerable talent, as well as considerable carelessness, displayed in parts; and, as usual, the passages of most poetry are those which are done the worst. We can give only Lord Leveson's version of the song with which the piece concludes. It is a sort of ballad, in which the principal characters of the play take each their verse: —

Second Cuirassier.

" Up, comrades, up! to horse, to horse!
To freedom and the field!
'Tis there that manhood knows its force,
The heart is there reveal'd;
'Tis there on no other the brave may rely —
He must fight for himself, by himself he must die.

Dragoon.

" Fair freedom yields the wide world's reign,
And slaves and masters share it;
And craft and falsehood forge the chain
For those who choose to wear it;
But the soldier the term of his sorrows can brave,
And look death in the face. — Who shall call him a slave?

First Yager.

" The cares of life he flings away,
Its doubt, its fear, its sorrow;
He beards his fate: — if miss'd to-day,
Is hit perchance to-morrow.
Are we mark'd for the morrow? Time's goblet runs low —
Let us drain the last exquisite drop ere we go.

Sergeant.

" From heaven his lot derives its birth,
By no long toil extorted,
Which still for treasure digs the earth,
By stones and rubbish thwarted. —
It digs and it shovels, and fashions with pain
The grave which its maker's own dust shall contain.

First Yager.

" Mid festal lamps, a fearful guest
The trembling bridegroom counts him,
Who thundering comes where none request,
The steed and he who mounts him.
His suit is not settled by parchment or form —
He wins not by parley, who woos but by storm.

Second Cuirassier.

" Why pales the cheek, why drops the tear?
Oh, see him part more coolly!
He has no lasting quarters here —
How can the brave love truly?
His fate drives him onward, and how can the mind
Be left with its loves and affections behind?

First Yager.

" Up, comrades! bridle and away,
With breasts for battle panting!
Youth boils, and fresh life flings its spray —
Up, ere that life be wanting!
Who would share it must stake it, and none who refuse
The hazard shall gain it — who stakes it may lose!"

In a spirit of foolish fairness, we will enable Lord Leveson thus far to take revenge. Should he think the translation that follows a more faded representation of the original than the above, it will only be another proof of the truth of Shakspeare's maxim, — "Were it as easy to do, as to know what ought to be done, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces." Many a critic has, we fear, been often justified in damning a play, and hissing a performance, though of infinitely less demerit than any possibility of his own. Our verses may claim, at least, the negative propriety of keeping somewhat closer to the metrical movement of the German; nor we have put into the mouth of a dragoon the words of a maudlin maiden, and let him speak of a soldier's death as the "term of his sorrows;" nor have we made the last notes of a flourish of trumpets for the charge send these veteran fatalists into the fight with an omen of discomfiture — in the disheartening close, "who stakes it may lose" — ringing in their ears: —

"To horse, my brave comrades, to horse! once met
In the field, we're again our own;
In the field a man is worth something yet,
And the strength of his heart is known:
There nobody takes of the soldier the wall,
'Tis man and himself — to stand or fall.

"Spirit and freedom are banish'd the land,
Master and slave alone you see;
Falsehood and cunning are high in command,
Down to the vassal of low degree.
Who calmly can look at Death full in the face,
The soldier's the freeman — the last of the race.

"All care about life he has thrown far away,
Nor hears tell of fear or sorrow;
Boldly he rides to his fate to-day —
If it comes not to-day, it will come to-morrow!
Then, if we've no morrow, to-day let us sup
Our last joyous drops from Time's holiday cup.

"'Tis folly to strive, and to struggle, and toil,
When Heaven sends a life of pleasure;
Let Hodge pass his days in upturning the soil,
And grovelling for hidden treasure:
He digs and he shovels, a pitiful knave,
Till at fourscore he finds himself digging his grave.

"One spring from his steed, and the rider alights,
A swift and fearful guest;
The bride-torch burns bright on the castle heights,
Uninvited, he joins the feast:
He stops not of parley or ransom to hear —
The storm of a midnight's the pay of a year.

"Why mourneth the maiden, and weepeth so sore?
Our motto is — Move, boys, move —
Our billets are quarter'd the wide world o'er,
And leave us small leisure for faithful love.
In no happy valley our tents are cast,
Fierce destiny urges us forward too fast.

" Then up, my brave comrades, and on with the bridle!
More freely we breathe in the thick of the fight;
The foam of youth's torrent is all the idle
Brush off — but let us do our work ere night.
Set your lives on the cast, and dash gallantly in:
Who nothing will venture, they nothing shall win."

Poetry with Lord L. Gower is evidently an art and an accomplishment; not a prophetical impulse, or divine necessity of nature. There is nothing of " that which the spirit putteth into my mouth, that must I speak." The only object in publishing verses written for mere amusement, must be that their author may obtain, in some way or other, the opinion of the public; therefore we feel at liberty to tell Lord Leveson, that he has conceived, from the first, far too humble an idea of poetry, even as an art; and that, if he has found amusement in these matters, he has acquired an art far better than the poetaster's, — to wit, that of being easily amused. Nevertheless, there are scattered up and down sufficient proofs of a light and lively hand, and a versatile management of numbers, to show that (in case he be willing to stoop to the requisite degree of concealed labour) he may look to a higher station than that in which the present volumes will place him among the middling poets of the day. It is our deliberate opinion, that he should patiently adhere to his plan of translating the thoughts of others, rather than risk any rash experiments with his own. As far as the choice of a subject is concerned, he appears much better qualified to do justice to writers characterised by spirited movement, or familiar and pointed sallies, than to masters of a higher mood, or to the minglers of the bright and delicate shades of feeling and expression. He will find ample scope and verge enough in the hourly enlarging field of German literature. Its philosophy, indeed, is too subtle and airy for our coarse and mechanical understandings, which seem to insist on some practical application even in the case of metaphysics. But German poetry has an affinity with our own. There is a beautifully imagined ode by Klopstock where he represents the Muse of Germany entering the lists, as for a race, with that of England. The cloud of dust and the intervening distance are supposed, as the competitors approach the goal, to conceal them from his sight. We moderns shall have shame, rather than honour, from the testimony borne in it to our mighty masters, if we can consent to an inglorious repose upon ancient, though indeed immortal, laurels. We would fain explain the woful exhibitions so long made by us in the Drama, by the single error of our having been tempted to try our fortune on this course under the cramping pressure of French pumps, rather than in the noble buskins of our forefathers, glorious in the dust of a hundred triumphs. Under this impression, we see no reason why we should shrink more in the case of tragic than in any other form of poetical rivalry from Klopstock's challenge. When the clouds roll from before that goal, God grant that our nineteenth century may show us (what, assuredly, our eighteenth cannot) an English dramatic poet, whose name is worthy to be mentioned with the names of Goethe and of Schiller!

POEMS OF MR. ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

THE MODERN PRACTICE OF PUFFING.*

THE wise men of antiquity loved to convey instruction under the covering of apologue; and, though this practice of theirs is generally thought childish, we shall make no apology for adopting it on the present occasion. A generation which has bought eleven editions of a poem by Mr. Robert Montgomery, may well condescend to listen to a fable of Pilpay.

A pious Brahmin, it is written, made a vow that on a certain day he would sacrifice a sheep, and on the appointed morning he went forth to buy one. There lived in his neighbourhood three rogues who knew of his vow, and laid a scheme for profiting by it. The first met him and said, "Oh, Brahmin, wilt thou buy a sheep? I have one fit for sacrifice." — "It is for that very purpose," said the holy man, "that I came forth this day." Then the impostor opened a bag, and brought out of it an unclean beast, an ugly dog, lame and blind. Thereon the Brahmin cried out, "Wretch, who touchest things impure, and utterest things untrue, callest thou that cur a sheep?" — "Truly," answered the other, "it is a sheep of the finest fleece, and of the sweetest flesh. Oh, Brahmin, it will be an offering most acceptable to the gods." — "Friend," said the Brahmin, "either thou or I must be blind."

Just then one of the accomplices came up. "Praised be the gods," said this second rogue, "that I have been saved the trouble of going to the market for a sheep! This is such a sheep as I wanted. For how much wilt thou sell it?" When the Brahmin heard this, his mind waved to and fro, like one swinging in the air at a holy festival. "Sir," said he to the new comer, "take heed what thou dost; this is no sheep but an unclean cur." — "Oh Brahmin," said the new comer, "thou art drunk or mad!"

At this time the third confederate drew near. "Let us ask this man," said the Brahmin, "what the creature is, and I will stand by what he shall say." To this the others agreed; and the Brahmin called out, "Oh, stranger, what dost thou call this beast?" — "Surely, oh, Brahmin," said the knave, "it is a fine sheep." Then the Brahmin said, "Surely the gods have taken away my senses," — and he asked pardon of him who carried the dog, and bought it for a measure of rice and a pot of ghee, and offered it up to the gods, who being wroth at this unclean sacrifice, smote him with a sore disease in all his joints.

Thus or nearly thus, if we remember rightly, runs the story of the Sanscrit Æsop. The moral, like the moral of every fable that is worth the telling, lies on the surface. The writer evidently means to caution us against the practices of puffers, — a class of people who have more than once talked the public into the most absurd errors, but who surely never played a more curious or more difficult trick, than when they passed Mr. Robert Montgomery off upon the world as a great poet.

In an age, in which there are so few readers that a writer cannot subsist on the sum arising from the sale of his works, no man who has not an independent fortune can devote himself to literary pursuits, unless he is assisted by patronage. In such an age, accordingly, men of letters too

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* The Omnipresence of the Deity, a Poem. By Robert Montgomery. London, 1828. — Vol. li. p. 193. April, 1830.

often pass their lives in dangling at the heels of the wealthy and powerful; and all the faults which dependence tends to produce, pass into their character. They become the parasites and slaves of the great. It is melancholy to think how many of highest and most exquisitely formed of human intellects have been condemned to the ignominious labour of disposing the commonplaces of adulation in new forms, and brightening them into new splendour. Horace, invoking Augustus in the most enthusiastic language of religious veneration, — Statius flattering a tyrant, and the minion of a tyrant, for a morsel of bread, — Ariosto versifying the whole genealogy of a niggardly patron, — Tasso extolling the heroic virtues of the wretched creature who locked him up in a mad-house, — these are but a few of the instances which might easily be given of the degradation to which those must submit, who not possessing a competent fortune, are resolved to write when there are scarcely any who read.

This evil the progress of the human mind tends to remove. As a taste for books becomes more and more common, the patronage of individuals becomes less and less necessary. In the earlier part of the last century a marked change took place. The tone of literary men, both in this country and in France, became higher and more independent. Pope boasted that he was the "one poet" who had "pleased by manly ways;" he derided the soft dedications with which Halifax had been fed, — asserted his own superiority over the pensioned Boileau, — and gloried in being not the follower, but the friend, of nobles and princes. The explanation of all this is very simple. Pope was the first Englishman who by the mere sale of his writings, realised a sum which enabled him to live in comfort and in perfect independence. Johnson extols him for the magnanimity which he showed in inscribing his Iliad, not to a minister or a peer, but to Congreve. In our time, this would scarcely be a subject for praise. Nobody is astonished when Mr. Moore pays a compliment of this kind to Sir Walter Scott, or Sir Walter Scott to Mr. Moore. The idea of either of those gentlemen looking out for some lord who would be likely to give him a few guineas in return for a fulsome dedication, seems laughably incongruous. Yet this is exactly what Dryden or Otway would have done; and it would be hard to blame them for it. Otway is said to have been choked with a piece of bread which he devoured in the rage of hunger; and, whether this story be true or false, he was beyond all question miserably poor. Dryden, at near seventy, when at the head of the literary men of England, without equal or second, received three hundred pounds for his Fables, — a collection of ten thousand verses, — and such verses as no man then living, except himself, could have produced. Pope, at thirty, had laid up between six and seven thousand pounds, — the fruits of his poetry. It was not, we suspect, because he had a higher spirit, or a more scrupulous conscience, than his predecessors, but because he had a larger income, that he kept up the dignity of the literary character so much better than they had done.

From the time of Pope to the present day, the readers have been constantly becoming more and more numerous; and the writers, consequently, more and more independent. It is assuredly a great evil, that men fitted by their talents and acquirements to enlighten and charm the world, should be reduced to the necessity of flattering wicked and foolish patrons in return for the very sustenance of life. But though we heartily rejoice that this evil is removed, we cannot but see with concern that another evil has succeeded to it. The public is now the patron, and a

most liberal patron. All that the rich and powerful bestowed on authors from the time of Mæcenas to that of Harley would not, we apprehend, make up a sum equal to that which has been paid by English booksellers to authors during the last thirty years. Men of letters have accordingly ceased to court individuals, and have begun to court the public. They formerly used flattery. They now use puffing.

Whether the old or the new vice be the worse, — whether those who formerly lavished insincere praise on others, or those who now contrive by every art of beggary and bribery to stun the public with praises of themselves, disgrace their vocation the more deeply, — we shall not attempt to decide. But of this we are sure, — that it is high time to make a stand against the new trickery. The puffing of books is now so shamefully and so successfully practised, that it is the duty of all who are anxious for the purity of the national taste, or for the honour of the literary character, to join in discountenancing it. All the pens that ever were employed in magnifying Bish's lucky office, Romanis's fleecy hosiery, Packwood's razor strops, and Rowland's Kalydor, — all the placard-bearers of Dr. Eady, — all the wall chalkers of Day and Martin, — seem to have taken service with the poets and novelists of this generation. Devices which in the lowest trades are considered as disreputable, are adopted without scruple, and improved upon with a despicable ingenuity, by people engaged in a pursuit which never was, and never will be, considered as a mere trade by any man of honour and virtue. A butcher of the higher class disdains to ticket his meat. A mercer of the higher class would be ashamed to hang up papers in his window inviting the passers-by to look at the stock of a bankrupt, all of the first quality, and going for half the value. We expect some reserve, some decent pride, in our hatter and our bootmaker. But no artifice by which notoriety can be obtained is thought too abject for a man of letters.

It is amusing to think over the history of most of the publications which have had a run during the last few years. The publisher is often the publisher of some periodical work. In this periodical work the first flourish of trumpets is sounded. The peal is then echoed and re-echoed by all the other periodical works over which the publisher or the author, or the author's coterie, may have any influence. The newspapers are for a fortnight filled with puffs of all the various kinds which Sheridan recounted, — direct, oblique, and collusive. Sometimes the praise is laid on thick for simple-minded people. "Pathetic," "sublime," "splendid," "graceful, brilliant wit," "exquisite humour," and other phrases equally flattering, fall in a shower as thick and as sweet as the sugar plums at a Roman carnival. Sometimes greater art is used. A sinecure has been offered to the writer if he would suppress his work, or if he would even soften down a few of his incomparable portraits. A distinguished military and political character has challenged the inimitable satirist of the vices of the great; and the puffer is glad to learn that the parties have been bound over to keep the peace. Sometimes it is thought expedient that the puffer should put on a grave face, and utter his panegyric in the form of admonition! "Such attacks on private character cannot be too much condemned. Even the exuberant wit of our author, and the irresistible power of his withering sarcasm, are no excuses for that utter disregard which he manifests for the feelings of others. We cannot but wonder that a writer of such transcendent talents, — a writer who is evidently no stranger to the kindly charities and sensibilities of our nature, should show so little tenderness to the foibles of noble and distinguished

individuals, with whom it is clear, from every page of his work, that he must have been constantly mingling in society." These are but tame and feeble imitations of the paragraphs with which the daily papers are filled whenever an attorney's clerk or an apothecary's assistant undertakes to tell the public, in bad English and worse French, how people tie their neckcloths and eat their dinners in Grosvenor Square. The editors of the higher and more respectable newspapers usually prefix the words "Advertisement," or "From a Correspondent," to such paragraphs. But this makes little difference. The panegyric is extracted, and the significant heading omitted. The fulsome eulogy makes its appearance on the covers of all the Reviews and Magazines, with "Times" or "Globe" affixed, though the editors of the Times and the Globe have no more to do with it than with Mr. Goss's way of making old rakes young again.

That people who live by personal slander, should practise these arts, is not surprising. Those who stoop to write calumnious books may well stoop to puff them;—and that the basest of all trades should be carried on in the basest of all manners, is quite proper, and as it should be: but how any man, who has the least self-respect, the least regard for his own personal dignity, can condescend to persecute the public with this Rag-fair importunity, we do not understand. Extreme poverty may, indeed, in some degree, be an excuse for employing these shifts, as it may be an excuse for stealing a leg of mutton. But we really think that a man of spirit and delicacy would quite as soon satisfy his wants in the one way as in the other.

It is no excuse for an author, that the praises of journalists are procured by the money or influence of his publisher, and not by his own. It is his business to take such precautions as may prevent others from doing what must degrade him. It is for his honour as a gentleman, and, if he is really a man of talents, it will eventually be for his honour and interest as a writer, that his works should come before the public, recommended by their own merits alone, and should be discussed with perfect freedom. If his objects be really such as he may own without shame, he will find that they will, in the long run, be better attained by suffering the voice of criticism to be fairly heard. At present, we too often see a writer attempting to obtain literary fame as Shakspeare's usurper obtains sovereignty. The publisher plays Buckingham to the author's Richard. Some few creatures of the conspiracy are dexterously disposed here and there in the crowd. It is the business of these hirelings to throw up their caps, and clap their hands, and utter their *vivas*. The rabble at first stare and wonder, and at last join in shouting for shouting's sake; and thus a crown is placed on a head which has no right to it, by the huzzas of a few servile dependants.

The opinion of the great body of the reading public is very materially influenced, even by the unsupported assertions of those who assume a right to criticise. Nor is the public altogether to blame on this account. Most, even of those who have really a great enjoyment in reading, are in the same state, with respect to a book, in which a man, who has never given particular attention to the art of painting, is with respect to a picture. Every man who has the least sensibility or imagination, derives a certain pleasure from pictures. Yet a man of the highest and finest intellect might, unless he had formed his taste by contemplating the best pictures, be easily persuaded by a knot of connoisseurs that the worst daub in Somerset-house was a miracle of art. If he deserves to be

laughed at, it is not for his ignorance of pictures, but for his ignorance of men. He knows that there is a delicacy of taste in painting which he does not possess; that he cannot discriminate hands, as practised judges can; that he is not familiar with the finest models; that he has never looked at them with close attention; and that, when the general effect of a piece has pleased him or displeased him, he has never troubled himself to ascertain why. When, therefore, people whom he thinks more competent to judge than himself, and of whose sincerity he entertains no doubt, assure him that a particular work is exquisitely beautiful, he takes it for granted that they must be in the right. He returns to the examination, resolved to find or imagine beauties; and if he can work himself up into something like admiration, he exults in his own proficiency.

Just such is the manner in which nine readers out of ten judge of a book. They are ashamed to dislike what men, who speak as having authority, declare to be good. At present, however contemptible a poem or a novel may be, there is not the least difficulty in procuring favourable notices of it from all sorts of publications, daily, weekly, and monthly. In the mean time, little or nothing is said on the other side. The author and the publisher are interested in crying up the book. Nobody has any very strong interest in crying it down. Those who are best fitted to guide the public opinion, think it beneath them to expose mere nonsense, and comfort themselves by reflecting that such popularity cannot last. This contemptuous lenity has been carried too far. It is perfectly true, that reputations which have been forced into an unnatural bloom, fade almost as soon as they have expanded; nor have we any apprehensions that puffing will ever raise any scribbler to the rank of a classic. It is, indeed, amusing to turn over some late volumes of periodical works, and to see how many immortal productions have, within a few months, been gathered to the Poems of Blackmore and the novels of Mrs. Behn; how many "profound views of human nature," and "exquisite delineations of fashionable manners," and "vernal, and sunny, and refreshing thoughts," and "high imaginings," and "young breathings," and "embodyings," and "pinings," and "minglings with the beauty of the universe," and "harmonies which dissolve the soul in a passionate sense of loveliness and divinity," the world has contrived to forget. The names of the books and the writers are buried in as deep an oblivion as the name of the builder of Stonehenge. Some of the well-puffed "fashionable novels" of the last, hold the pastry of the present year; and others of the class, which are now extolled in language almost too high-flown for the merits of Don Quixote, will, we have no doubt, line the trunks of eighteen hundred and thirty-one. But though we have no apprehensions that puffing will ever confer permanent reputation on the undeserving, we still think its influence most pernicious. Men of real merit will, if they persevere, at last reach the station to which they are entitled, and intruders will be ejected with contempt and derision. But it is no small evil that the avenues to fame should be blocked up by a swarm of noisy, pushing, elbowing pretenders, who, though they will not ultimately be able to make good their own entrance, hinder, in the mean time, those who have a right to enter. All who will not disgrace themselves by joining in the unseemly scuffle must expect to be at first hustled and shouldered back. Some men of talents, accordingly, turn away in dejection from pursuits, in which success appears to bear no proportion to desert. Others employ in self-defence the means by which competitors, far inferior to themselves, appear for a time to obtain a decided advantage. There are few who have sufficient confidence in

their own powers, and sufficient elevation of mind, to wait with secure and contemptuous patience, while dunce after dunce presses before them. Those who will not stoop to the baseness of the modern fashion are too often discouraged. Those who stoop to it are always degraded.

We have of late observed with great pleasure some symptoms which lead us to hope, that respectable literary men of all parties are beginning to be impatient of this insufferable nuisance. And we purpose to do what in us lies for the abating of it. We do not think that we can more usefully assist in this good work, that by showing our honest countrymen what that sort of poetry is which puffing can drive through eleven editions: and how easily any bellman might, if a bellman would stoop to the necessary degree of meanness, become "a master-spirit of the age." We have no enmity to Mr. Robert Montgomery. We know nothing whatever about him, except what we have learned from his books, and from the portrait prefixed to one of them, in which he appears to be doing his very best to look like a man of genius and sensibility, though with less success than his strenuous exertions deserve. We select him, because his works have received more enthusiastic praise, and have deserved more unmixed contempt, than any which, as far as our knowledge extends, have appeared within the last three or four years. His writing bears the same relation to poetry which a Turkey carpet bears to a picture. There are colours in the Turkey carpet, out of which a picture might be made. There are words in Mr. Montgomery's verses, which, when disposed in certain orders and combinations, have made, and will again make, good poetry. But, as they now stand, they seem to be put together on principle, in such a manner as to give no image of any thing in the "heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth."

The poem on the *Omnipresence of the Deity* commences with a description of the creation, in which we can find only one thought which has the least pretension to ingenuity, and that one thought is stolen from Dryden, and marred in the stealing —

> "Last, softly beautiful as music's close,
> Angelic woman into being rose."

The all-pervading influence of the Supreme Being is then described in a few tolerable lines borrowed from Pope, and a great, many intolerable lines of Mr. Robert Montgomery's own. The following may stand as a specimen: —

> "But who could trace Thine unrestricted course,
> Though Fancy follow'd with immortal force?
> There's not a blossom fondled by the breeze,
> There's not a fruit that beautifies the trees,
> There's not a particle in sea or air,
> But nature owns thy plastic influence there!
> With fearful gaze, still be it mine to see
> How all is fill'd and vivified by Thee;
> Upon thy mirror, earth's majestic view,
> To paint Thy presence, and to feel it too."

The last two lines contain an excellent specimen of Mr. Robert Montgomery's Turkey-carpet style of writing. The majestic view of earth is the mirror of God's presence; and on this mirror Mr. Robert Montgomery paints God's presence. The use of a mirror, we submit, is not to be painted upon.

A few more lines, as bad as those which we have quoted, bring us to one

of the most amusing instances of literary pilfering which we remember. It might be of use to plagiarists to know, as a general rule, that what they steal is, to employ a phrase common in advertisements, of no use to any but the right owner. We never fell in, however, with any plunderer who so little understood how to turn his booty to good account as Mr. Montgomery. Lord Byron, in a passage which every body knows by heart, has said, addressing the sea —

> "Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow."

Mr. Robert Montgomery very coolly appropriates the image, and reproduces the stolen goods in the following form: —

> "And thou, vast Ocean, on whose awful face
> Time's iron feet can print no ruin-trace."

So may such ill-got gains ever prosper!

The effect which the Ocean produces on Atheists is then described in the following lofty lines: —

> "Oh! never did the dark-soul'd ATHEIST stand,
> And watch the breakers boiling on the strand,
> And, while Creation stagger'd at his nod,
> Mock the dread presence of the mighty God!
> We hear Him in the wind-heaved ocean's roar,
> Hurling her billowy crags upon the shore;
> We hear Him in the riot of the blast,
> And shake, while rush the raving whirlwinds past!"

If Mr. Robert Montgomery's genius were not far too free and aspiring to be shackled by the rules of syntax, we should suppose that it is at the nod of the Atheist that creation shudders, and that it is this same dark-souled Atheist who hurls billowy crags upon the shore.

A few more lines bring us to another instance of unprofitable theft. Sir Walter Scott has these lines in the Lord of the Isles —

> "The dew that on the violet lies,
> Mocks the dark lustre of thine eyes."

This is pretty taken separately, and, as is almost always the case with good things of good writers, much prettier in its place than can even be conceived by those who see it only detached from the context. Now for Mr. Montgomery —

> "And the bright dew-bead on the bramble lies,
> Like liquid rapture upon beauty's eyes."

The comparison of a violet, bright with the dew, to a woman's eyes, is as perfect as a comparison can be. Sir Walter's lines are part of a song addressed to a woman, and the comparison is therefore peculiarly natural and graceful. Dew on a bramble, is no more like a woman's eyes than dew any where else. There is a very pretty Eastern tale, of which the fate of plagiarists often reminds us. The slave of a magician saw his master wave his wand, and heard him give orders to the spirits who arose at the summons. He accordingly stole the wand, and waved it himself in the air; but he had not observed that his master used the left hand for that purpose. The spirits thus irregularly summoned, tore him to pieces, instead of obeying his orders. There are very few that can safely venture to conjure with the rod of Sir Walter, and we are sure that Mr. Robert Montgomery is not one of them.

Mr. Campbell, in one of his most pleasant pieces, has this line —

> "The sentinel stars set their watch in the sky."

The thought is good — and has a very striking propriety where Mr. Campbell has placed it — in the mouth of a soldier telling his dream. But though Shakspeare assures us that "every true man's apparel fits your thief," it is by no means the case, as we have already seen, that every true poet's similitude fits your plagiarist. Let us see how Mr. Robert Montgomery uses the image —

> "Ye quenchless stars! so eloquently bright,
> Untroubled sentries of the shadowy night,
> While half the world is lapp'd in downy dreams,
> And round the lattice creep your midnight beams,
> How sweet to gaze upon your placid eyes,
> In lambent beauty looking from the skies!"

Certainly the ideas of eloquence — of untroubled repose — of placid eyes, on the lambent beauty of which it is sweet to gaze, harmonise admirably with the idea of a sentry!

We would not be understood, however, to say, that Mr. Robert Montgomery cannot make similitudes for himself. A very few lines farther on, we find one which has every mark of originality, and on which, we will be bound, none of the poets whom he has plundered will ever think of making reprisals: —

> "The soul, aspiring, pants its source to mount,
> As streams meander level with their fount."

We take this to be, on the whole, the worst similitude in the world. In the first place, no stream meanders, or can possibly meander, level with its fount. In the next place, if streams did meander level with their founts, no two motions can be less like than that of meandering level, and that of mounting upwards.

We have then an apostrophe to the Deity, couched in terms which, in any writer who dealt in meanings, we should call profane, but to which, we suppose, Mr. Robert Montgomery attaches no idea whatever: —

> "Yes! pause and think, within one fleeting hour,
> How vast a universe obeys Thy power;
> Unseen, but felt, Thine interfused control
> Works in each atom, and pervades the whole;
> Expands the blossom, and erects the tree,
> Conducts each vapour, and commands each sea,
> Beams in each ray, bids whirlwinds be unfurl'd,
> Unrols the thunder, and upheaves a world!"

No field-preacher ever carried his irreverent familiarity so far, as to bid the Supreme Being stop and meditate on the importance of the interests which are under his care. The grotesque indecency of such an address throws into shade the subordinate absurdities of the passage, the unfurling of whirlwinds, the unrolling of thunder, and the upheaving of worlds.

Then comes a curious specimen of our poet's English —

> "Yet not alone created realms engage
> Thy faultless wisdom, grand, primeval sage!
> For all the thronging woes to life allied
> Thy mercy tempers, and Thy cares provide."

We should be glad to know what the word "For" means here. If it is a preposition, it makes nonsense of the words, "Thy mercy tempers." If it is an adverb, it makes nonsense of the words, "Thy cares provide."

These beauties we have taken, almost at random, from the first part

of the poem. The second part is a series of descriptions of various events, — a battle — a murder — an execution — a marriage — a funeral, — and so forth. Mr. Robert Montgomery terminates each of these descriptions by assuring us that the Deity was present at the battle, murder, execution, marriage, or funeral, in question. And this proposition, which might be safely predicated of every event that ever happened, or ever will happen, forms the only link which connects these descriptions with the subject, or with each other.

How the descriptions are executed, our readers are probably by this time able to conjecture. The battle is made up of the battles of all ages and nations; "red-mouth'd cannons, uproaring to the clouds," and "hands grasping firm the glittering shield." The only military operations of which this part of the poem reminds us, are those which reduced the Abbey of Quedlinburgh to submission — The Templar with his cross — the Austrian and Prussian grenadiers in full uniform — and Curtius and Dentatus with their battering-ram. We ought not to pass by unnoticed the slain war-horse, who will no more —

> "Roll his red eye, and rally for the fight;"

or the slain warrior, who, while "lying on his bleeding breast," contrives to "stare ghastly and grimly on the skies." As to this last exploit, we can only say, as Dante did on a similar occasion, —

> "Forse per forza gia di parlasia
> Si stravolse così alcun del tutto:
> Ma io nol vidi, nè credo che sia."

The tempest is thus described —

> "But lo! around the marsh'lling clouds unite,
> Like thick battalions halting for the fight;
> The sun sinks back, the tempest spirits sweep
> Fierce through the air, and flutter on the deep.
> Till from their caverns rush the maniac blasts,
> Tear the loose sails, and split the creaking masts,
> And the lash'd billows, rolling in a train,
> Rear their white heads, and race along the main!"

What, we should like to know, is the difference between the two operations which Mr. Robert Montgomery so accurately distinguishes from each other, — the fierce sweeping of the tempest spirits through the air, and the rushing of the maniac blasts from their caverns? And why does the former operation end exactly when the latter commences?

We cannot stop over each of Mr. Robert Montgomery's descriptions. We have a shipwrecked sailor, who "visions a viewless temple in the air;" — a murderer, who stands on a heath, "with ashy lips, in cold convulsion spread;" — a pious man, to whom, as he lies in bed at night, —

> "The panorama of past life appears,
> Warms his pure mind, and melts it into tears;" —

a traveller, who loses his way, owing to the thickness of the "cloud-battalion," and the want of "heaven-lamps, to beam their holy light." We have a description of a convicted felon, stolen from that incomparable passage in Crabbe's Borough, which has made many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child. We can, however, conscientiously declare, that persons of the most excitable sensibility may safely venture upon it in Mr. Robert Montgomery's alteration. Then we have the "poor, mindless, pale-faced, maniac boy," who —

——— " Rolls his vacant eye,
To greet the glowing fancies of the sky."

What are glowing fancies of the sky? And what is the meaning of the two lines which almost immediately follow?

" A soulless thing, a spirit of the woods,
He loves to commune with the fields and floods."

How can a soulless thing be a spirit? Then comes a panegyric on the Sunday. A baptism follows; — after that a marriage; — and we then proceed, in due course, to the visitation of the sick, and the burial of the dead.

Often as Death has been personified, Mr. Montgomery has found something new to say about him.

" O Death! thou dreadless vanquisher of earth,
The Elements shrank blasted at thy birth!
Careering round the world like tempest wind,
Martyrs before, and victims strew'd behind;
Ages on ages cannot grapple thee,
Dragging the world into eternity!"

If there be any one line in this passage about which we are more in the dark than about the rest, it is the fourth. What the difference may be between the victims and the martyrs, and why the martyrs are to lie before Death, and the victims behind him, are to us great mysteries.

We now come to the third part, of which we may say with honest Cassio, " Why, this is a more excellent song than the other." Mr. Robert Montgomery is very severe on the infidels, and undertakes to prove, that, as he elegantly expresses it,

" One great Enchanter helm'd the harmonious whole."

What an enchanter has to do with helming, or what a helm has to do with harmony, we do not quite understand. He proceeds with his argument thus: —

" And dare men dream that dismal Chance has framed
All that the eye perceives, or tongue has named;
The spacious world, and all its wonders, born
Designless, self-created, and forlorn;
Like to the flashing bubbles on a stream,
Fire from the cloud, or phantom in a dream?"

We should be sorry to stake our faith in a higher Power on Mr. Robert Montgomery's logic. Does he believe that lightning, and bubbles, and the phenomena of dreams, are designless and self-created? If he does, we cannot conceive why he may not believe that the whole universe is designless and self-created. A few lines before, he tells us that it is the Deity who bids " thunder rattle from the skiey deep." His theory is therefore this, that God made the thunder, but that the lightning made itself.

But Mr. Robert Montgomery's metaphysics are not at present our game. He proceeds to set forth the fearful effects of Atheism: —

" Then, blood-stain'd Murder, bare thy hideous arm,
And thou, Rebellion, welter in thy storm:
Awake, ye spirits of avenging crime;
Burst from your bonds, and battle with the time!"

Mr. Robert Montgomery is fond of personification, and belongs, we need not say, to that school of poets who hold that nothing more is

necessary to the personification in poetry, than to begin a word with a capital letter. Murder may, without impropriety, bare her arm, — as she did long ago, in Mr. Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*. But what possible motive Rebellion can have for weltering in her storm, — what avenging crime may be, — who its spirits may be, — why they should burst from their bonds, — what their bonds may be, — why they should battle with the time, — what the time may be, — and what a battle between the time and the spirits of avenging crime would resemble, we must confess ourselves quite unable to understand.

> " And here let Memory turn her tearful glance
> On the dark horrors of tumultuous France,
> When blood and blasphemy defiled her land,
> And fierce Rebellion shook her savage hand."

Whether Rebellion shakes her own hand, shakes the hand of Memory, or shakes the hand of France, or what any one of these metaphors would mean, we know no more than we know what is the sense of the following passage: —

> " Let the foul orgies of infuriate crime
> Picture the raging havoc of that time,
> When leagued Rebellion march'd to kindle man,
> Fright in her rear, and Murder in her van.
> And thou, sweet flower of Austria, slaughter'd Queen,
> Who dropp'd no tear upon the dreadful scene,
> When gush'd the life-blood from thine angel form,
> And martyr'd beauty perish'd in the storm,
> Once worshipp'd paragon of all who saw,
> Thy look obedience, and thy smile a law," &c.

What is the distinction between the foul orgies, and the raging havoc which the foul orgies are to picture? Why does Fright go behind Rebellion, and Murder before? Why should not Murder fall behind Fright? Or why should not all the three walk abreast? We have read of a hero who had

> " Amazement in his van, with Flight combined,
> And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind."

Gray, we suspect, could have given a reason for disposing the allegorical attendants of Edward thus. But to proceed: — " Flower of Austria" is stolen from Byron. " Dropp'd" is false English. " Perish'd in the storm " means nothing at all: and " thy look obedience" means the very reverse of what Mr. Robert Montgomery intends to say.

Our poet then proceeds to demonstrate the immortality of the soul: —

> " And shall the soul, the fount of reason, die,
> When dust and darkness round its temple lie?
> Did God breathe in it no ethereal fire,
> Dimless and quenchless, though the breath expire?"

The soul is a fountain; and therefore it is not to die, though dust and darkness lie round its temple, because an ethereal fire has been breathed into it, which cannot be quenched though its breath expire. Is it the fountain, or the temple, that breathes, and has fire breathed into it?

Mr. Montgomery apostrophises the

> " Immortal beacons, — spirits of the just," —

and describes their employments in another world, which are to be, it seems, bathing in light, hearing fiery streams flow, and riding on living

cars of lightning. The deathbed of the sceptic is described with what we suppose is meant for energy.

> "See how he shudders at the thought of death!
> What doubt and horror hang upon his breath,
> The gibbering teeth, glazed eye, and marble limb,
> Shades from the tomb stalk out and stare at him."

A man as stiff as marble, shuddering and gibbering violently, would certainly present so curious a spectacle, that the shades, if they came in his way, might well stare.

We then have the deathbed of a Christian made as ridiculous as false imagery and false English can make it. But this is not enough: — The Day of Judgment is to be described,—and a roaring cataract of nonsense is poured forth upon this tremendous subject. Earth, we are told, is dashed into Eternity. Furnace blazes wheel round the horizon, and burst into bright wizard phantoms. Racing hurricanes unroll and whirl quivering fire-clouds. The white waves gallop. Shadowy worlds career around. The red and raging eye of Imagination is then forbidden to pry further. But further Mr. Robert Montgomery persists in prying. The stars bound through the airy roar. The unbosomed deep yawns on the ruin. The billows of Eternity then begin to advance. The world glares in fiery slumber. A car comes forward driven by living thunder.

> "Creation shudders with sublime dismay,
> And in a blazing tempest whirls away."

And this is fine poetry! This is what ranks its writer with the master spirits of the age! This is what has been described over and over again, in terms which would require some qualification if used respecting Paradise Lost! It is too much that this patchwork, made by stitching together old odds and ends of what, when new, was, for the most part, but tawdry frippery, is to be picked off the dunghill on which it ought to rot, and to be held up to admiration as an inestimable specimen of art. And what must we think of a system, by means of which verses like those which we have quoted — verses fit only for the poet's corner of the Morning Post — can produce emolument and fame? The circulation of this writer's poetry has been greater than that of Southey's Roderic, and beyond all comparison greater than that of Cary's Dante, or of the best works of Coleridge. Thus encouraged, Mr. Robert Montgomery has favoured the public with volume after volume. We have given so much space to the examination of his first and most popular performance, that we have none to spare for his *Universal Prayer*, and his smaller poems, which, as the puffing journals tell us, would alone constitute a sufficient title to literary immortality. We shall pass at once to his last publication, entitled *Satan*.

This poem was ushered into the world with the usual roar of acclamation. But the thing was now past a joke. Pretensions so unfounded, so impudent, and so successful, had aroused a spirit of resistance. In several magazines and reviews, accordingly, Satan has been handled somewhat roughly, and the arts of the puffers have been exposed with good sense and spirit. We shall, therefore, be very concise.

Of the two poems, we rather prefer that on the Omnipresence of the Deity, for the same reason which induced Sir Thomas More to rank one bad book above another. "Marry, this is so somewhat. This is rhyme. But the other is neither rhyme nor reason." Satan is a long soliloquy, which the devil pronounces in five or six thousand lines of blank verse, concerning geography, politics, newspapers, fashionable society, theatrical

amusements, Sir Walter Scott's novels, Lord Byron's poetry, and Mr. Martin's pictures. The new designs for Milton have, as was natural, particularly attracted the attention of a personage who occupies so conspicuous a place in them. Mr. Martin must be pleased to learn, that, whatever may be thought of those performances on earth, they give full satisfaction in Pandemonium, and that he is there thought to have hit off the likenesses of the various Thrones and Dominations very happily.

The motto to the poem of Satan is taken from the Book of Job: — "Whence comest thou? — From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." And certainly Mr. Robert Montgomery has not failed to make his hero go to and fro, and walk up and down. With the exception, however, of this propensity to locomotion, Satan has not one Satanic quality. Mad Tom had told us, that "the prince of darkness is a gentleman;" but we had yet to learn that he is a respectable and pious gentleman, whose principal fault is, that he is something of a twaddle, and far too liberal of his good advice. That happy change in his character which Origen anticipated, and of which Tillotson did not despair, seems to be rapidly taking place. Bad habits are not eradicated in a moment. It is not strange, therefore, that so old an offender should now and then relapse for a short time into wrong dispositions. But to give him his due, as the proverb recommends, we must say, that he always returns, after two or three lines of impiety, to his preaching tone. We would seriously advise Mr. Montgomery to omit, or alter, about a hundred lines in different parts of this large volume, and to republish it under the name of "Gabriel." The reflections of which it consists would come less absurdly, as far as there is a more and a less in extreme absurdity, from a good than from a bad angel.

We can afford room only for a single quotation. We give one taken at random — neither worse nor better, as far as we can perceive, than any other equal number of lines in the book. The Devil goes to the play, and moralises thereon as follows: —

> "Music and Pomp their mingling spirit shed
> Around me; beauties in their cloud-like robes
> Shine forth, — a scenic paradise, it glares
> Intoxication through the reeling sense
> Of flush'd enjoyment. In the motley host
> Three prime gradations may be rank'd: the first,
> To mount upon the wings of Shakspeare's mind,
> And win a flash of his Promethean thought, —
> To smile and weep, to shudder, and achieve
> A round of passionate omnipotence,
> Attend: the second are a sensual tribe
> Convened to hear romantic harlots sing,
> On forms to banquet a lascivious gaze,
> While the bright perfidy of wanton eyes
> Though brain and spirit darts delicious fire;
> The last, a throng most pitiful! who seem,
> With their corroded figures, rayless glance
> And death-like struggle of decaying age,
> Like painted skeletons in charnel pomp
> Set forth to satirise the human kind; —
> How fine a prospect for demoniac view!
> 'Creatures whose souls outbalance worlds awake!'
> Methinks I hear a pitying angel cry."

Here we conclude. If our remarks give pain to Mr. Robert Montgomery, we are sorry for it. But, at whatever cost of pain to individuals,

literature must be purified from this taint. And, to show that we are not actuated by any feelings of personal enmity towards him, we hereby give notice, that, as soon as any book shall, by means of puffing, reach a second edition, our intention is to do unto the writer of it as we have done unto Mr. Robert Montgomery.*

LIFE AND POETRY OF LORD BYRON.†

We have read this book with the greatest pleasure. Considered merely as a composition, it deserves to be classed among the best specimens of English prose which our age has produced. It contains, indeed, no single passage equal to two or three which we could select from the Life of Sheridan. But, as a whole, it is immeasurably superior to that work. The style is agreeable, clear, and manly; and, when it rises into eloquence, rises without effort or ostentation. Nor is the matter inferior to the manner.

It would be difficult to name a book which exhibits more of kindness, fairness, and modesty. It has evidently been written, not for the purpose of showing—what, however, it often shows—how well its author can write; but for the purpose of vindicating, as far as truth will permit, the memory of a celebrated man who can no longer vindicate himself. Mr. Moore never thrusts himself between Lord Byron and the public. With the strongest temptations to egotism, he has said no more about himself than the subject absolutely required. A great part — indeed the greater part — of these volumes consists of extracts from the Letters and Journals of Lord Byron; and it is difficult to speak too highly of the skill which has been shown in the selection and arrangement. We will not say that we have not occasionally remarked in these two large quartos an anecdote which should have been omitted, a letter which should have been suppressed, a name which should have been concealed by asterisks, or asterisks which do not answer the purpose of concealing the name. But it is impossible, on a general survey, to deny that the task has been executed with great judgment and great humanity. When we consider the life which Lord Byron had led, his petulance, his irritability, and his communicativeness, we cannot but admire the dexterity with which Mr. Moore has contrived to exhibit so much of the character and opinions of his friend, with so little pain to the feelings of the living.

The extracts from the journals and correspondence of Lord Byron are in the highest degree valuable — not merely on account of the information which they contain respecting the distinguished man by whom they

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* Want of room precludes the possibility of the following interesting articles, which I had selected, being added to the other essays on Poetry and the Drama:— A *critique* on Wordsworth's Excursion, said to be written by Mr. Jeffrey, Vol. xxiv. p. 1.; a dissertation on the controversy concerning the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, attributed to Sir Walter Scott, Vol. vi. p. 429.; a review of Campbell's Specimens of British Poetry, Vol. xxxi. p. 462.; Strictures on the Lays of the Minnesingers or German Troubadours of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Vol. xliii. p. 107.; Review of the Paradise of Coquettes, Vol. xxiv. p. 397.

† Letters and Journals of Lord Byron; with Notices of his Life. By Thomas Moore, Esq. 2 Vols.—Vol. liii. p. 544. June, 1831.

were written, but on account, also, of their rare merit as compositions. The Letters — at least those which were sent from Italy — are among the best in our language. They are less affected than those of Pope and Walpole; — they have more matter in them than those of Cowper. Knowing that many of them were not written merely for the person to whom they were directed, but were general epistles, meant to be read by a large circle, we expected to find them clever and spirited, but deficient in ease. We looked with vigilance for instances of stiffness in the language, and awkwardness in the transitions. We have been agreeably disappointed; and we must confess, that if the epistolary style of Lord Byron was artificial, it was a rare and admirable instance of that highest art, which cannot be distinguished from nature.

Of the deep and painful interest which this book excites, no abstract can give a just notion. So sad and dark a story is scarcely to be found in any work of fiction; and we are little disposed to envy the moralist who can read it without being softened.

The pretty fable by which the Duchess of Orleans illustrates the character of her son the regent, might, with little change, be applied to Byron. All the fairies, save one, had been bidden to his cradle. All the gossips had been profuse of their gifts. One had bestowed nobility; another, genius; a third, beauty. The malignant elf, who had been uninvited, came last, and, unable to reverse what her sisters had done for their favourite, had mixed up a curse with every blessing. In the rank of Lord Byron, in his understanding, in his character, in his very person, there was a strange union of opposite extremes. He was born to all that men covet and admire. But in every one of those eminent advantages which he possessed over others, there was mingled something of misery and debasement. He was sprung from a house, ancient indeed and noble, but degraded and impoverished by a series of crimes and follies, which had attained a scandalous publicity. The kinsman whom he succeeded had died poor, and, but for merciful judges, would have died upon the gallows. The young peer had great intellectual powers; yet there was an unsound part in his mind. He had naturally a generous and tender heart; but his temper was wayward and irritable. He had a head which statuaries loved to copy; and a foot, the deformity of which the beggars in the streets mimicked. Distinguished at once by the strength and by the weakness of his intellect, affectionate yet perverse, a poor lord, and a handsome cripple, he required, if ever man required, the firmest and the most judicious training. But, capriciously as nature had dealt with him, the relative to whom the office of forming his character was intrusted, was more capricious still. She passed from paroxysms of rage to paroxysms of fondness. At one time she stifled him with her caresses — at another time she insulted his deformity. He came into the world, and the world treated him as his mother treated him — sometimes with kindness, and sometimes with severity, never with justice. It indulged him without discrimination, and punished him without discrimination. He was truly a spoiled child, — not merely the spoiled child of his parent, but the spoiled child of nature, the spoiled child of fortune, the spoiled child of fame, the spoiled child of society. His first poems were received with a contempt which, feeble as they were, they did not absolutely deserve. The poem which he published on his return from his travels was, on the other hand, extolled far above its merit. At twenty-four he found himself on the highest pinnacle of literary fame, with Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, and a crowd of other distinguished writers,

beneath his feet. There is scarcely an instance in history, of so sudden a rise to so dizzy an eminence.

Every thing that could stimulate, and every thing that could gratify the strongest propensities of our nature — the gaze of a hundred drawing-rooms, the acclamations of the whole nation, the applause of applauded men, the love of the loveliest women — all this world, and all the glory of it, — were at once offered to a young man to whom nature had given violent passions, and whom education had never taught to control them. He lived as many men live who have no similar excuses to plead for their faults. But his countrymen and his countrywomen would love him and admire him. They were resolved to see in his excesses only the flash and outbreak of that same fiery mind which glowed in his poetry. He attacked religion; yet in religious circles his name was mentioned with fondness, and in many religious publications his works were censured with singular tenderness. He lampooned the Prince Regent; yet he could not alienate the Tories. Every thing, it seemed, was to be forgiven to youth, rank, and genius.

Then came the reaction. Society, capricious in its indignation as it had been capricious in its fondness, flew into a rage with its froward and petted darling. He had been worshipped with an irrational idolatry. He was persecuted with an irrational fury. Much has been written about those unhappy domestic occurrences which decided the fate of his life. Yet nothing is, nothing ever was, so positively known to the public, but this, — that he quarrelled with his lady, and that she refused to live with him. There have been hints in abundance, and shrugs and shakings of the head, and "Well, well, we know," and "We could an if we would," and "If we list to speak," and "There be that might an they list." But we are not aware that there is before the world, substantiated by credible, or even by tangible evidence, a single fact indicating that Lord Byron was more to blame than any other man who is on bad terms with his wife. The professional men whom Lady Byron consulted, were undoubtedly of opinion that she ought not to live with her husband. But it is to be remembered that they formed that opinion without hearing both sides. We do not say, we do not mean to insinuate, that Lady Byron was in any respect to blame. We think that those who condemn her on the evidence which is now before the public, are as rash as those who condemn her husband. We will not pronounce any judgment; we cannot, even in our own minds, form any judgment on a transaction which is so imperfectly known to us. It would have been well if, at the time of the separation, all those who knew as little about the matter then as we know about it now, had shown that forbearance, which, under such circumstances, is but common justice.

We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces, and family quarrels, pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines, that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly, some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved than hundreds whose offences have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. If he has children, they are to be taken from him. If he has a profession, he is to be driven from it. He is cut by the higher orders, and hissed by the lower. He is, in truth, a sort of

whipping-boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised. We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England, with the Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart-broken. And our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more.

It is clear that those vices which destroy domestic happiness ought to be as much as possible repressed. It is equally clear that they cannot be repressed by penal legislation. It is therefore right and desirable that public opinion should be directed against them. But it should be directed against them uniformly, steadily, and temperately, not by sudden fits and starts. There should be one weight and one measure. Decimation is always an objectionable mode of punishment. It is the resource of judges too indolent and hasty to investigate facts, and to discriminate nicely between shades of guilt. It is an irrational practice, even when adopted by military tribunals. When adopted by the tribunal of public opinion, it is infinitely more irrational. It is good that a certain portion of disgrace should constantly attend on certain bad actions. But it is not good that the offenders merely have to stand the risks of a lottery of infamy; that ninety-nine out of every hundred should escape; and that the hundredth, perhaps the most innocent of the hundred, should pay for all. We remember to have seen a mob assembled in Lincoln's Inn to hoot a gentleman, against whom the most oppressive proceeding known to the English law was then in progress. He was hooted because he had been an indifferent and unfaithful husband, as if some of the most popular men of the age — Lord Nelson, for example — had not been indifferent and unfaithful husbands. We remember a still stronger case. Will posterity believe, that in an age in which men, whose gallantries were universally known, and had been legally proved, filled some of the highest offices in the state, and in the army — presided at the meetings of religious and benevolent institutions — were the delight of every society, and the favourites of the multitude — a crowd of moralists went to the theatre, in order to pelt a poor actor for disturbing the conjugal felicity of an alderman? What there was in the circumstances, either of the offender, or of the sufferer, to vindicate the zeal of the audience, we could never conceive. It has never been supposed that the situation of an actor is peculiarly favourable to the rigid virtues, or that an alderman enjoys any special immunity from injuries such as that which on this occasion roused the anger of the public. But such is the justice of mankind.

In these cases, the punishment was excessive; but the offence was known and proved. The case of Lord Byron was harder. True Jedwood justice was dealt out to him. First came the execution, then the investigation, and last of all, or rather not at all, the accusation. The public, without knowing any thing whatever about the transactions in his family, flew into a violent passion with him, and proceeded to invent stories which might justify its anger. Ten or twenty different accounts of the separation, inconsistent with each other, with themselves, and with common sense, circulated at the same time. What evidence there might be for any one of these, the virtuous people who repeated them neither knew nor cared: for in fact these stories were not the causes, but the effects, of the public indignation. They resembled those loathsome slanders which Goldsmith, and other abject libellers of the same class, were in the habit of publishing about Bonaparte; — how he poisoned a girl with arsenic when he was at the military school, — how he hired

a grenadier to shoot Dessaix at Marengo, — how he filled St. Cloud with all the pollutions of Capreæ. There was a time when anecdotes like these obtained some credence from persons, who, hating the French emperor, without knowing why, were eager to believe any thing which might justify their hatred. Lord Byron fared in the same way. His countrymen were in a bad humour with him. His writings and his character had lost the charm of novelty. He had been guilty of the offence which, of all offences, is punished most severely; he had been over-praised; he had excited too warm an interest; and the public, with its usual justice, chastised him for its own folly. The attachments of the multitude bear no small resemblance to those of the wanton enchantress in the Arabian Tales, who, when the forty days of her fondness were over, was not content with dismissing her lovers, but condemned them to expiate, in loathsome shapes, and under severe punishments, the crime of having once pleased her too well.

The obloquy which Byron had to endure, was such as might well have shaken a more constant mind. The newspapers were filled with lampoons. The theatres shook with execrations. He was excluded from circles where he had lately been the observed of all observers. All those creeping things that riot in the decay of nobler natures, hastened to their repast; and they were right; — they did after their kind. It is not every day that the savage envy of aspiring dunces is gratified by the agonies of such a spirit, and the degradation of such a name.

The unhappy man left his country for ever. The howl of contumely followed him across the sea, up the Rhine, over the Alps; it gradually waxed fainter; it died away. Those who had raised it began to ask each other, what, after all, was the matter about which they had been so clamorous; and wished to invite back the criminal whom they had just chased from them. His poetry became more popular than it had ever been; and his complaints were read with tears by thousands and tens of thousands who had never seen his face.

He had fixed his home on the shores of the Adriatic, in the most picturesque and interesting of cities, beneath the brightest of skies, and by the brightest of seas. Censoriousness was not the vice of the neighbours whom he had chosen. They were a race corrupted by a bad government and a bad religion; long renowned for skill in the arts of voluptuousness, and tolerant of all the caprices of sensuality. From the public opinion of the country of his adoption he had nothing to dread. With the public opinion of the country of his birth he was at open war. He plunged into wild and desperate excesses, ennobled by no generous or tender sentiment. From his Venetian haram he sent forth volume after volume, full of eloquence, of wit, of pathos, of ribaldry, and of bitter disdain. His health sank under the effects of his intemperance. His hair turned grey. His food ceased to nourished him. A hectic fever withered him up. It seemed that his body and mind were about to perish together.

From this wretched degradation he was in some measure rescued by an attachment, culpable indeed, yet such as, judged by the standard of morality established in the country where he lived, might be called virtuous. But an imagination polluted by, vice, a temper embittered by msfortune, and a frame habituated to the fatal excitement of intoxication, prevented him from fully enjoying the happiness which he might have derived from the purest and most tranquil of his many attachments. Midnight draughts of ardent spirits and Rhenish wines

had begun to work the ruin of his fine intellect. His verse lost much of the energy and condensation which had distinguished it. But he would not resign, without a struggle, the empire which he had exercised over the men of his generation. A new dream of ambition arose before him; — to be the centre of a literary party — the great mover of an intellectual revolution, — to guide the public mind of England from his Italian retreat, as Voltaire had guided the public mind of France from the villa of Ferney. With this hope, as it should seem, he established *The Liberal*. But, powerfully as he had affected the imaginations of his contemporaries, he mistook his own powers, if he hoped to direct their opinions; and he still more grossly mistook his own disposition, if he thought that he could long act in concert with other men of letters. The plan failed, and failed ignominiously: angry with himself, angry with his coadjutors, he relinquished it; and turned to another project, the last and the noblest of his life.

A nation, once the first among the nations, pre-eminent in knowledge, pre-eminent in military glory, the cradle of philosophy, of eloquence, and of the fine arts, had been for ages bowed down under a cruel yoke. All the vices which tyranny generates — the abject vices which it generates in those who submit to it — the ferocious vices which it generates in those who struggle against it — had deformed the character of that miserable race. The valour which had won the great battle of human civilisation, — which had saved Europe, and subjugated Asia, — lingered only among pirates and robbers. The ingenuity, once so conspicuously displayed in every department of physical and moral science, had been depraved into timid and servile cunning. On a sudden this degraded people had risen on their oppressors. Discountenanced or betrayed by the surrounding potentates, they had found in themselves something of that which might well supply the place of all foreign assistance, — something of the energy of their fathers.

As a man of letters, Lord Byron could not but be interested in the event of this contest. His political opinions, though, like all his opinions, unsettled, leaned strongly towards the side of liberty. He had assisted the Italian insurgents with his purse; and if their struggle against the Austrian government had been prolonged, would probably have assisted them with his sword. But to Greece he was attached by peculiar ties. He had, when young, resided in that country. Much of his most splendid and popular poetry had been inspired by its scenery and by its history. Sick of inaction, — degraded in his own eyes by his private vices and by his literary failures, — pining for untried excitement and honourable distinction, — he carried his exhausted body and his wounded spirit to the Grecian camp.

His conduct in his new situation showed so much vigour and good sense as to justify us in believing, that, if his life had been prolonged, he might have distinguished himself as a soldier and a politician. But pleasure and sorrow had done the work of seventy years upon his delicate frame. The hand of death was on him: he knew it; and the only wish which he uttered was that he might die sword in hand.

This was denied to him. Anxiety, exertion, exposure, and those fatal stimulants which had become indispensable to him, soon stretched him on a sick-bed, in a strange land, amidst strange faces, without one human being that he loved near him. There, at thirty-six, the most celebrated Englishman of the nineteenth century closed his brilliant and miserable career.

We cannot even now retrace those events without feeling something of what was felt by the nation, when it was first known that the grave had closed over so much sorrow and so much glory; — something of what was felt by those who saw the hearse, with its long train of coaches, turn slowly northward, leaving behind it that cemetery, which had been consecrated by the dust of so many great poets, but of which the doors were closed against all that remained of Byron. We well remember that, on that day, rigid moralists could not refrain from weeping for one so young, so illustrious, so unhappy, gifted with such rare gifts, and tried by such strong temptations. It is unnecessary to make any reflections. The history carries its moral with it. Our age has indeed been fruitful of warnings to the eminent, and of consolations to the obscure. Two men have died within our recollection, who, at a time of life at which few people have completed their education, had raised themselves, each in his own department, to the height of glory. One of them died at Longwood, the other at Missolonghi.

It is always difficult to separate the literary character of a man who lives in our own time from his personal character. It is peculiarly difficult to make this separation in the case of Lord Byron. For it is scarcely too much to say, that Lord Byron never wrote without some reference, direct or indirect, to himself. The interest excited by his life mingles itself in our minds, and probably in the minds of almost all our readers, with the interest which properly belongs to his works. A generation must pass away before it will be possible to form a fair judgment of his books, considered merely as books. At present they are not only books, but relics. We will, however, venture, though with unfeigned diffidence, to offer some desultory remarks on his poetry.

His lot was cast in the time of a great literary revolution. That poetical dynasty which had dethroned the successors of Shakspeare and Spenser was, in its turn, dethroned by a race who represented themselves as heirs of the ancient line, so long dispossessed by usurpers. The real nature of this revolution has not, we think, been comprehended by the great majority of those who concurred in it.

If this question were proposed — wherein especially does the poetry of our times differ from that of the last century? — ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would answer that the poetry of the last century was correct, but cold and mechanical, and that the poetry of our time, though wild and irregular, presented far more vivid images, and excited the passions far more strongly than that of Parnell, of Addison, or of Pope. In the same manner we constantly hear it said, that the poets of the age of Elizabeth had far more genius, but far less correctness, than those of the age of Anne. It seems to be taken for granted, that there is some necessary incompatibility, some antithesis between correctness and creative power. We rather suspect that this notion arises merely from an abuse of words; and that it has been the parent of many of the fallacies which perplex the science of criticism.

What is meant by correctness in poetry? If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules which have their foundation in truth, and in the principles of human nature, then correctness is only another name for excellence. If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules purely arbitrary, correctness may be another name for dulness and absurdity.

A writer who describes visible objects falsely, and violates the propriety of character, — a writer who makes the mountains "nod their drowsy heads" at night, or a dying man take leave of the world with a

rant like that of Maximin, — may be said, in the high and just sense of the phrase, to write incorrectly. He violates the first great law of his art. His imitation is altogether unlike the thing imitated. The four poets who are most eminently free from incorrectness of this description are Homer, Dante, Shakspeare, and Milton. They are, therefore, in one sense, and that the best sense, the most correct of poets.

When it is said that Virgil, though he had less genius than Homer, was a more correct writer, what sense is attached to the word correctness? Is it meant that the story of the Æneid is developed more skilfully than that of the Odyssey? — that the Roman describes the face of the external world, or the emotions of the mind, more accurately than the Greek? — that the characters of Achates and Mnestheus are more nicely discriminated, and more consistently supported, than those of Achilles, of Nestor, and of Ulysses? The fact incontestably is, that for every violation of the fundamental laws of poetry, which can be found in Homer, it would be easy to find twenty in Virgil.

Troilus and Cressida is perhaps of all the plays of Shakspeare that which is commonly considered as the most incorrect. Yet it seems to us infinitely more correct, in the sound sense of the term, than what are called the most correct plays of the most correct dramatists. Compare it, for example, with the Iphigénie of Racine. We are sure that the Greeks of Shakspeare bear a far greater resemblance than the Greeks of Racine to the real Greeks who besieged Troy; and for this reason, that the Greeks of Shakspeare are human beings, and the Greeks of Racine mere names; — mere words printed in capitals at the head of paragraphs of declamation. Racine, it is true, would have shuddered at the thought of making Agamemnon quote Aristotle. But of what use is it to avoid a single anachronism, when the whole play is one anachronism, — the topics and phrases of Versailles in the camp of Aulis?

In the sense in which we are now using the word correctness, we think that Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Coleridge, are far more correct writers than those who are commonly extolled as the models of correctness, — Pope, for example, and Addison. The single description of a moonlight night in Pope's Iliad contains more inaccuracies than can be found in all the Excursion. There is not a single scene in Cato, in which every thing that conduces to poetical illusion, — the propriety of character, of language, of situation, — is not more grossly violated than in any part of the Lay of the Last Minstrel. No man can possibly think that the Romans of Addison resemble the real Romans, so closely as the moss-troopers of Scott resemble the real moss-troopers. Watt Tinlinn and William of Deloraine are not, it is true, persons of so much dignity as Cato. But the dignity of the persons represented has as little to do with the correctness of poetry as with the correctness of painting. We prefer a gipsy by Reynolds to his Majesty's head on a sign-post, and a Borderer by Scott to a senator by Addison.

In what sense, then, is the word correctness used by those who say, with the author of the Pursuits of Literature, that Pope was the most correct of English Poets, and that, next to Pope, came the late Mr. Gifford? What is the nature and value of that correctness, the praise of which is denied to Macbeth, to Lear, and to Othello, and given to Hoole's translations and to all the Seatonian prize-poems? We can discover no eternal rule — no rule founded in reason and in the nature of things — which Shakspeare does not observe much more strictly than Pope. But if by correctness be meant the conforming to a narrow legislation, which,

while lenient to the *mala in se*, multiplies, without the shadow of a reason, the *mala prohibita*, — if by correctness be meant a strict attention to certain ceremonious observances, which are no more essential to poetry than etiquette to good government, or than the washings of a Pharisee to devotion, — then, assuredly, Pope may be a more correct poet than Shakspeare; and, if the code were a little altered, Colley Cibber might be a more correct poet than Pope. But it may well be doubted whether this kind of correctness be a merit — nay, whether it be not an absolute fault.

It would be amusing to make a digest of the irrational laws which bad critics have framed for the government of poets. First in celebrity and in absurdity stand the dramatic unities of place and time. No human being has ever been able to find any thing that could, even by courtesy, be called an argument for these unities, except that they have been deduced from the general practice of the Greeks. It requires no very profound examination to discover that the Greek dramas, often admirable as compositions, are, as exhibitions of human character and human life, far inferior to the English plays of the age of Elizabeth. Every scholar knows that the dramatic part of the Athenian tragedies was at first subordinate to the lyrical part. It would, therefore, have been little less than a miracle, if the laws of the Athenian stage had been found to suit plays in which there was no chorus. All the greatest masterpieces of the dramatic art have been composed in direct violation of the unities, and could never have been composed if the unities had not been violated. It is clear, for example, that such a character as that of Hamlet could never have been developed within the limits to which Alfieri confined himself. Yet such was the reverence of literary men during the last century for these unities, that Johnson, who, much to his honour, took the opposite side, was, as he says, "frighted at his own temerity;" and "afraid to stand against the authorities which might be produced against him."

There are other rules of the same kind without end. "Shakspeare," says Rymer, "ought not to have made Othello black; for the hero of a tragedy ought always to be white." "Milton," says another critic, "ought not to have taken Adam for his hero; for the hero of an epic poem ought always to be victorious." "Milton," says another, "ought not to have put so many similes into his first book; for the first book of an epic poem ought always to be the most unadorned. There are no similes in the first book of the Iliad." "Milton," says another, "ought not to have placed in an epic poem such lines as these: —

'I also erred in overmuch admiring.'"

And why not? The critic is ready with a reason — a lady's reason. "Such lines," says he, "are not, it must be allowed, unpleasing to the ear; but the redundant syllable ought to be confined to the drama, and not admitted into epic poetry." As to the redundant syllable in heroic rhyme, on serious subjects, it has been, from the time of Pope downward, proscribed by the general consent of all the correct school. No magazine would have admitted so incorrect a couplet as that of Drayton —

"As when we lived untouch'd with these disgraces,
When as our kingdom was our dear embraces."

Another law of heroic poetry, which, fifty years ago, was considered as fundamental, was, that there should be a pause — a comma at least — at the end of every couplet. It was also provided that there should never be a full stop except at the end of a couplet. Well do we remember to

have heard a most correct judge of poetry revile Mr. Rogers for the incorrectness of that most sweet and graceful passage —

> " 'Twas thine, Maria, thine, without a sigh,
> At midnight in a sister's arms to die,
> Nursing the young to health."

Sir Roger Newdigate is fairly entitled, we think, to be ranked among the great critics of this school. He made a law that none of the poems written for the prize which he established at Oxford should exceed fifty lines. This law seems to us to have at least as much foundation in reason as any of those which we have mentioned — nay, much more, for the world, we believe, is pretty well agreed in thinking that the shorter a prize-poem is, the better.

We do not see why we should not make a few more rules of the same kind, — why we should not enact that the number of scenes in every act shall be three, or some multiple of three, — that the number of lines in every scene shall be an exact square, — that the *dramatis personæ* shall never be more or fewer than sixteen, — and that, in heroic rhymes, every thirty-sixth line shall have twelve syllables. If we were to lay down these canons, and to call Pope, Goldsmith, and Addison, incorrect writers for not having complied with our whims, we should act precisely as those critics act, who find incorrectness in the magnificent imagery and the varied music of Coleridge and Shelley.

The correctness which the last century prized so much, resembled the correctness of those pictures of the garden of Eden which we see in old Bibles, — an exact square, enclosed by the rivers Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates, each with a convenient bridge in the centre — rectangular beds of flowers — a long canal, neatly bricked and railed in — the tree of knowledge, clipped like one of the limes behind the Tuilleries, standing in the centre of the grand alley — the snake twined round it — the man on the right hand, the woman on the left, and the beasts drawn up in an exact circle round them. In one sense the picture is correct enough. That is to say, the squares are correct; the circles are correct; the man and the woman are in a most correct line with the tree; and the snake forms a most correct spiral.

But if there were a painter so gifted, that he should place in the canvass that glorious paradise, seen by the interior eye of him whose outward sight had failed with long watching and labouring for liberty and truth, — if there were a painter who could set before us the mazes of the sapphire brook, the lake with its fringe of myrtles, the flowery meadows, the grottoes overhung by vines, the forests shining with Hesperian fruit and with the plumage of gorgeous birds, the massy shade of that nuptial bower which showered down roses on the sleeping lovers, — what should we think of a connoisseur who should tell us that this painting, though finer than the absurd picture in the old Bible, was not so correct? Surely we should answer — It is both finer and more correct; and it is finer because it is more correct. It is not made up of correctly drawn diagrams; but it is a correct painting — a worthy representation of that which it is intended to represent.

It is not in the fine arts alone that this false correctness is prized by narrow-minded men — by men who cannot distinguish means from ends, or what is accidental from what is essential. M. Jourdain admired correctness in fencing. " You had no business to hit me then. You must never thrust in *quart* till you have thrust in *tierce*." M. Tomés

liked correctness in medical practice. "I stand up for Artemius. That he killed his patient is plain enough. But still he acted quite according to rule. A man dead is a man dead; and there is an end of the matter. But if rules are to be broken, there is no saying what consequences may follow." We have heard of an old German officer, who was a great admirer of correctness in military operations. He used to revile Bonaparte for spoiling the science of war, which had been carried to such exquisite perfection by Marshal Daun. "In my youth we used to march and countermarch all the summer without gaining or losing a square league, and then we went into winter quarters. And now comes an ignorant, hotheaded young man, who flies about from Boulogne to Ulm, and from Ulm to the middle of Moravia, and fights battles in December. The whole system of his tactics is monstrously incorrect." The world is of opinion, in spite of critics like these, that the end of fencing is to hit, that the end of medicine is to cure, that the end of war is to conquer, and that those means are the most correct which best accomplish the ends.

And has poetry no end,—no eternal and immutable principles? Is poetry, like heraldry, mere matter of arbitrary regulation? The heralds tell us that certain scutcheons and bearings denote certain conditions, and that to put colours on colours, or metals on metals, is false blazonry. If all this were reversed,—if every coat of arms in Europe were new fashioned,—if it were decreed that *or* should never be placed but on *argent*, or *argent* but on *or*,—that illegitimacy should be denoted by a *lozenge*, and widowhood by a *bend*,—the new science would be just as good as the old science, because both the new and the old would be good for nothing. The mummery of Portcullis and Rouge Dragon, as it has no other value than that which caprice has assigned to it, may well submit to any laws which caprice may impose on it. But it is not so with that great imitative art, to the power of which, all ages, the rudest and the most enlightened, bear witness. Since its first great masterpieces were produced, every thing that is changeable in this world has been changed. Civilisation has been gained, lost, gained again. Religions, and languages, and forms of government, and usages of private life, and modes of thinking, all have undergone a succession of revolutions. Every thing has passed away but the great features of nature, the heart of man, and the miracles of that art, of which it is the office to reflect back the heart of man and the features of nature. Those two strange old poems, the wonder of ninety generations, still retain all their freshness. They still command the veneration of minds, enriched by the literature of many nations and ages. They are still, even in wretched translations, the delight of schoolboys. Having survived ten thousand capricious fashions, having seen successive codes of criticism become obsolete, they still remain, immortal with the immortality of truth,—the same when perused in the study of an English scholar, as when they were first chanted at the banquets of the Ionian princes.

Poetry is, as that most acute of human beings, Aristotle, said more than two thousand years ago, imitation. It is an art analogous in many respects to the arts of painting, sculpture, and acting. The imitations of the painter, the sculptor, and the actor, are, indeed, within certain limits, more perfect than those of the poet. The machinery which the poet employs, consists merely of words; and words cannot, even when employed by such an artist as Homer or Dante, present to the mind images of visible objects quite so lively and exact as those which carry away from looking on the works of the brush and the chisel. But, on the

other hand, the range of poetry is infinitely wider than that of any other imitative art, or than that of all the other imitative arts together. The sculptor can imitate only form; the painter only form and colour; the actor, until the poet supplies him with words, only form, colour, and motion. Poetry holds the outer world in common with the other arts. The heart of man is the province of poetry, and of poetry alone. The painter, the sculptor, and the actor, when the actor is unassisted by the poet, can exhibit no more of human passion and character than that small portion which overflows into the gesture and the face — always an imperfect, often a deceitful, sign of that which is within. The deeper and more complex parts of human nature can be exhibited by means of words alone. Thus the objects of the imitation of poetry are the whole external and the whole internal universe, the face of nature, the vicissitudes of fortune, man as he is in himself, man as he appears in society, all things of which we can form an image in our minds, by combining together parts of things which really exist. The domain of this imperial art is commensurate with the imaginative faculty.

An art essentially imitative ought not surely to be subjected to rules which tend to make its imitations less perfect than they would otherwise be; and those who obey such rules ought to be called, not correct, but incorrect artists. The true way to judge of the rules by which English poetry was governed during the last century, is to look at the effects which they produced.

It was in 1780 that Johnson completed his Lives of the Poets. He tells us in that work, that since the time of Dryden, English poetry had shown no tendency to relapse into its original savageness; that its language had been refined, its numbers tuned, and its sentiments improved. It may, perhaps, be doubted whether the nation had any great reason to exult in the refinements and improvements which gave it Douglas for Othello, and the Triumphs of Temper for the Fairy Queen.

It was during the thirty years which preceded the appearance of Johnson's Lives, that the diction and versification of English poetry were, in the sense in which the word is commonly used, most correct. Those thirty years form the most deplorable part of our literary history. They have bequeathed to us scarcely any poetry which deserves to be remembered. Two or three hundred lines of Gray, twice as many of Goldsmith, a few stanzas of Beattie and Collins, a few strophes of Mason, and a few clever prologues and satires, were the masterpieces of this age of consummate excellence. They may all be printed in one volume, and that volume would be by no means a volume of extraordinary merit. It would contain no poetry of the highest class, and little which could be placed very high in the second class. The Paradise Regained, or Comus, would outweigh it all.

At last, when poetry had fallen into snch utter decay that Mr. Hayley was thought a great poet, it began to appear that the excess of the evil was about to work the cure. Men became tired of an insipid conformity to a standard which derived no authority from nature or reason. A shallow criticism had taught them to ascribe a superstitious value to the spurious correctness of poetasters. A deeper criticism brought them back to the free correctness of the first great masters. The eternal laws of poetry regained their power, and the temporary fashions which had superseded those laws went after the wig of Lovelace and the hoop of Clarissa.

It was in a cold and barren season that the seeds of that rich harvest

which we have reaped, were first sown. While poetry was every year becoming more feeble and more mechanical,—while the monotonous versification which Pope had introduced, no longer redeemed by his brilliant wit and his compactness of expression, palled on the ear of the public,—the great works of the dead were every day attracting more and more of the admiration which they deserved. The plays of Shakspeare were better acted, better edited, and better known, than they had ever been. Our noble old ballads were again read with pleasure, and it became a fashion to imitate them. Many of the imitations were altogether contemptible. But they showed that men had at least begun to admire the excellence which they could not rival. A literary revolution was evidently at hand. There was a ferment in the minds of men,—a vague craving for something new—a disposition to hail with delight any thing which might at first sight wear the appearance of originality. A reforming age is always fertile of impostors. The same excited state of public feeling which produced the great separation from the see of Rome, produced also the excesses of the Anabaptists. The same stir in the public mind of Europe, which overthrew the abuses of the old French government, produced the Jacobins and Theophilanthropists; Macpherson and the Della Cruscas were to the true reformers of English poetry, what Knipperdolling was to Luther, or what Clootz was to Turgot. The public was never more disposed to believe stories without evidence, and to admire books without merit. Any thing which could break the dull monotony of the correct school was acceptable.

The forerunner of the great restoration of our literature was Cowper. His literary career began and ended at nearly the same time with that of Alfieri. A parallel between Alfieri and Cowper may, at first sight, seem as unpromising as that which a loyal Presbyterian minister is said to have drawn, in 1745, between George the Second and Enoch. It may seem that the gentle, shy, melancholy Calvinist, whose spirit had been broken by fagging at school,—who had not courage to earn a livelihood by reading the titles of bills in the House of Lords,—and whose favourite associates were a blind old lady and an evangelical divine,—could have nothing in common with the haughty, ardent, and voluptuous nobleman, the horse-jockey, the libertine, who fought Lord Ligonier in Hyde Park, and robbed the Pretender of his queen. But though the private lives of these remarkable men present scarcely any points of resemblance, their literary lives bear a close analogy to each other. They both found poetry in its lowest state of degradation,—feeble, artificial, and altogether nerveless. They both possessed precisely the talents which fitted them for the task of raising it from that deep abasement. They cannot, in strictness, be called great poets. They had not in any high degree the creative power,

"The vision and the faculty divine;"

but they had great vigour of thought, great warmth of feeling, and—what, in their circumstances, was above all things important—a manliness of taste which approached to roughness. They did not deal in mechanical versification and conventional phrases. They wrote concerning things, the thought of which set their hearts on fire; and thus what they wrote, even when it wanted every other grace, had that inimitable grace which sincerity and strong passion impart to the rudest and most homely compositions. Each of them sought for inspiration in a noble and affecting subject, fertile of images, which had not yet been hackneyed. Liberty was the muse of Alfieri,—Religion was the muse of Cowper. The same

truth is found in their lighter pieces. They were not among those who deprecated the severity, or deplored the absence, of an unreal mistress in melodious commonplaces. Instead of raving about imaginary Chloes and Sylvias, Cowper wrote of Mrs. Unwin's knitting-needles. The only love verses of Alfieri were addressed to one whom he truly and passionately loved. "Tutte le rime amorose che seguono," says he, "tutte sono per essa, e ben sue, e di lei solamente poichè mai d' altra donna per certo non canterò."

These great men were not free from affectation. But their affectation was directly opposed to the affectation which generally prevailed. Each of them has expressed, in strong and bitter language, the contempt which he felt for the effeminate poetasters who were in fashion both in England and in Italy. Cowper complains that

> "Manner is all in all, whate'er is writ,
> The substitute for genius, taste, and wit."

He praised Pope; yet he regretted that Pope had

> "Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
> And every warbler had his tune by heart."

Alfieri speaks with similar scorn of the tragedies of his predecessors. "Mi cadevano dalle mani per la languidezza, trivialità e prolissità dei modi e del verso, senza parlare poi della snervatezza dei pensieri. Or perchè mai questa nostra divina lingua, sì maschia anco, ed energica, e feroce, in bocca di Dante, dovra ella farsi così sbiadata ed eunuca nel dialogo tragico."

To men thus sick of the languid manner of their contemporaries, ruggedness seemed a venial fault, or rather a positive merit. In their hatred of meretricious ornament, and of what Cowper calls "creamy smoothness," they erred on the opposite side. Their style was too austere, their versification too harsh. It is not easy, however, to overrate the service which they rendered to literature. Their merit is rather that of demolition than that of construction. The intrinsic value of their poems is considerable. But the example which they set of mutiny against an absurd system was invaluable. The part which they performed was rather that of Moses than that of Joshua. They opened the house of bondage; — but they did not enter the promised land.

During the twenty years which followed the death of Cowper, the revolution in English poetry was fully consummated. None of the writers of this period, not even Sir Walter Scott, contributed so much to the consummation as Lord Byron. Yet he, Lord Byron, contributed to it unwillingly, and with constant self-reproach and shame. All his tastes and inclinations led him to take part with the school of poetry which was going out, against the school which was coming in. Of Pope himself he spoke with extravagant admiration. He did not venture directly to say that the little man of Twickenham was a greater poet than Shakspeare or Milton. But he hinted pretty clearly that he thought so. Of his contemporaries, scarcely any had so much of his admiration as Mr. Gifford, who, considered as a poet, was merely Pope, without Pope's wit and fancy; and whose satires are decidedly inferior in vigour and poignancy to the very imperfect juvenile performance of Lord Byron himself. He now and then praised Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Coleridge; but ungraciously, and without cordiality. When he attacked them, he brought his whole soul to the work. Of the most elaborate of Mr. Wordsworth's poems he could find nothing to say, but that it was "clumsy, and frowsy,

and his aversion." Peter Bell excited his spleen to such a degree, that he apostrophised the shades of Pope and Dryden, and demanded of them whether it were possible that such trash could evade contempt? In his heart, he thought his own Pilgrimage of Harold inferior to his Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry, — a feeble echo of Pope and Johnson. This insipid performance he repeatedly designed to publish, and was withheld only by the solicitations of his friends. He has distinctly declared his approbation of the unities; the most absurd laws by which genius was ever held in servitude. In one of his works, we think in his Letter to Mr. Bowles, he compares the poetry of the eighteenth century to the Parthenon, and that of the nineteenth to a Turkish mosque; and boasts that, though he had assisted his contemporaries in building their grotesque and barbarous edifice, he had never joined them in defacing the remains of a chaster and more graceful architecture. In another letter, he compares the change which had recently passed on English poetry, to the decay of Latin poetry after the Augustan age. In the time of Pope, he tells his friend, it was all Horace with us. It is all Claudian now.

For the great old masters of the art he had no very enthusiastic veneration. In his Letter to Mr. Bowles he uses expressions which clearly indicate that he preferred Pope's Iliad to the original. Mr. Moore confesses that his friend was no very fervent admirer of Shakspeare. Of all the poets of the first class, Lord Byron seems to have admired Dante and Milton most. Yet in the fourth canto of Childe Harold he places Tasso — a writer not merely inferior to them, but of quite a different order of mind — on at least a footing of equality with them. Mr. Hunt is, we suspect, quite correct in saying, that Lord Byron could see little or no merit in Spenser.

But Lord Byron the critic, and Lord Byron the poet, were two very different men. The effects of his theory may indeed often be traced in his practice. But his disposition led him to accommodate himself to the literary taste of the age in which he lived; and his talents would have enabled him to accommodate himself to the taste of any age. Though he said much of his contempt for men, and though he boasted that amidst all the inconstancy of fortune and of fame he was all-sufficient to himself, his literary career indicated nothing of that lonely and unsocial pride which he affected. We cannot conceive him, like Milton or Wordsworth, defying the criticism of his contemporaries, retorting their scorn, and labouring on a poem in the full assurance that it would be unpopular, and in the full assurance that it would be immortal. He has said, by the mouth of one of his heroes, in speaking of political greatness, that "he must serve who fain would sway;" and this he assigns as a reason for not entering into political life. He did not consider that the sway which he had exercised in literature had been purchased by servitude — by the sacrifice of his own taste to the taste of the public.

He was the creature of his age; and wherever he had lived, he would have been the creature of his age. Under Charles I. he would have been more quaint than Donne. Under Charles II. the rants of his rhyming plays would have pitted it, boxed it, and galleried it, with those of any Bayes or Bilboa. Under George I. the monotonous smoothness of his versification, and the terseness of his expression, would have made Pope himself envious.

As it was, he was the man of the last thirteen years of the eighteenth century, and of the first twenty-three years of the nineteenth century. He belonged half to the old, and half to the new school of

poetry. His personal taste led him to the former; his thirst of fame to the latter; — his talents were equally suited to both. His fame was a common ground on which the zealots of both sides — Gifford, for example, and Shelley — might meet. He was the representative, not of either literary party, but of both at once, and of their conflict, and of the victory by which that conflict was terminated. His poetry fills and measures the whole of the vast interval through which our literature has moved since the time of Johnson. It touches the Essay on Man at the one extremity, and the Excursion at the other.

There are several parallel instances in literary history. Voltaire, for example, was the connecting link between the France of Louis the Fourteenth, and the France of Louis the Sixteenth, — between Racine and Boileau on the one side, and Condorcet and Beaumarchais on the other. He, like Lord Byron, put himself at the head of an intellectual revolution, — dreading it all the time, — murmuring at it, — sneering at it, — yet choosing rather to move before his age in any direction, than to be left behind and forgotten. Dryden was the connecting link between the literature of the age of James the First and the literature of the age of Anne. Oromandes and Arimanes fought for him — Arimanes carried him off. But his heart was to the last with Oromandes. Lord Byron was, in the same manner, the mediator between two generations — between two hostile poetical sects. Though always sneering at Mr. Wordsworth, he was yet, though perhaps unconsciously, the interpreter between Mr. Wordsworth and the multitude. In the Lyrical Ballads and the Excursion, Mr. Wordsworth appeared as the high priest of a worship, of which Nature was the idol. No poems have ever indicated so exquisite a perception of the beauty of the outer world, or so passionate a love and reverence for that beauty. Yet they were not popular; — and it is not likely that they ever will be popular as the works of Sir Walter Scott are popular. The feeling which pervaded them was too deep for general sympathy. Their style was often too mysterious for general comprehension. They made a few esoteric disciples, and many scoffers. Lord Byron founded what may be called an esoteric Lake school of poetry; and all the readers of poetry in England, we might say in Europe, hastened to sit at his feet. What Mr. Wordsworth had said like a recluse, Lord Byron said like a man of the world, — with less profound feeling, but with more perspicuity, energy, and conciseness. We would refer our readers to the last two cantos of Childe Harold, and to Manfred, in proof of these observations.

Lord Byron, like Mr. Wordsworth, had nothing dramatic in his genius. He was indeed the reverse of a great dramatist; the very antithesis to a great dramatist. All his characters, — Harold looking back on the western sky, from which his country and the sun are receding together, — the Giaour, standing apart in the gloom of the side-aisle, and casting a haggard scowl from under his long hood at the crucifix and the censer, — Conrad, leaning on his sword by the watch-tower, — Lara, smiling on the dancers, — Alp, gazing steadily on the fatal cloud as it passes before the moon, — Manfred, wandering among the precipices of Berne, — Azzo, on the judgment-seat, — Ugo, at the bar, — Lambro, frowning on the siesta of his daughter and Juan, — Cain, presenting his unacceptable offering, — are all essentially the same. The varieties are varieties merely of age, situation, and costume. If ever Lord Byron attempted to exhibit men of a different kind, he always made them either insipid or unnatural. Selim is nothing. Bonnivard is nothing. Don Juan, in the first and best

cantos, is a feeble copy of the Page in the Marriage of Figaro. Johnson, the man whom Juan meets in the slave-market, is a most striking failure. How differently would Sir Walter Scott have drawn a bluff, fearless Englishman, in such a situation! The portrait would have seemed to walk out of the canvass.

Sardanapalus is more hardly drawn than any dramatic personage that we can remember. His heroism and his effeminacy, — his contempt of death, and his dread of a weighty helmet, — his kingly resolution to be seen in the foremost ranks, and the anxiety with which he calls for a looking-glass, that he may be seen to advantage, are contrasted with all the point of Juvenal. Indeed the hint of the character seems to have been taken from what Juvenal says of Otho: —

——"Speculum civilis sarcina belli.
Nimirum summi ducis est occidere Galbam,
Et curare cutem summi constantia civis,
Bebriaci in campo spolium affectare Palati,
Et pressum in facie digitis extendere panem."

These are excellent lines in a satire. But it is not the business of the dramatist to exhibit characters in this sharp antithetical way. It is not in this way that Shakspeare makes Prince Hal rise from the rake of Eastcheap into the hero of Shrewsbury, and sink again into the rake of Eastcheap. It is not thus that Shakspeare has exhibited the union of effeminacy and valour in Antony. A dramatist cannot commit a greater error than that of following those pointed descriptions of character, in which satirists and historians indulge so much. It is by rejecting what is natural, that satirists and historians produce these striking characters. Their great object generally is to ascribe to every man as many contradictory qualities as possible: and this is an object easily attained. By judicious selection and judicious exaggeration, the intellect and the disposition of any human being might be described as being made up of nothing but startling contrasts. If the dramatist attempts to create a being answering to one of these descriptions, he fails, because he reverses an imperfect analytical process. He produces, not a man, but a personified epigram. Very eminent writers have fallen into this snare. Ben Jonson has given us a Hermogenes, taken from the lively lines of Horace; but the inconsistency, which is so amusing in the satire, appears unnatural, and disgusts us, in the play. Sir Walter Scott has committed a far more glaring error of the same kind in the novel of Peveril. Admiring, as every reader must admire, the keen and vigorous lines in which Dryden satirised the Duke of Buckingham, he attempted to make a Duke of Buckingham to suit them,—a real living Zimri;—and he made, not a man, but the most grotesque of all monsters. A writer who should attempt to introduce into a play or a novel such a Wharton as the Wharton of Pope, or a Lord Hervey answering to Sporus, would fail in the same manner.

But to return to Lord Byron: his women, like his men, are all of one breed. Haidée is a half-savage and girlish Julia; Julia is a civilised and matronly Haidée. Leila is a wedded Zuleika — Zuleika a virgin Leila. Gulnare and Medora appear to have been intentionally opposed to each other. Yet the difference is a difference of situation only. A slight change of circumstances would, it should seem, have sent Gulnare to the lute of Medora, and armed Medora with the dagger of Gulnare.

It is hardly too much to say that Lord Byron could exhibit only one man and only one woman, — a man proud, moody, cynical, — with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart; a scorner of his kind, impla-

cable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection; — a woman all softness and gentleness, loving to caress and to be caressed, but capable of being transformed by love into a tigress.

Even these two characters, his only two characters, he could not exhibit dramatically. He exhibited them in the manner, not of Shakspeare, but of Clarendon. He analysed them. He made them analyse themselves, but he did not make them show themselves. He tells us, for example, in many lines of great force and spirit, that the speech of Lara was bitterly sarcastic, — that he talked little of his travels, — that, if much questioned about them, his answers became short, and his brow gloomy. But we have none of Lara's sarcastic speeches, or short answers. It is not thus that the great masters of human nature have portrayed human beings. Homer never tells us that Nestor loved to tell long stories about his youth; Shakspeare never tells us that in the mind of Iago every thing that is beautiful and endearing was associated with some filthy and debasing idea.

It is curious to observe the tendency which the dialogue of Lord Byron always has to lose its character of dialogue, and to become soliloquy. The scenes between Manfred and the Chamois hunter, — between Manfred and the Witch of the Alps, — between Manfred and the Abbot, are instances of this tendency. Manfred, after a few unimportant speeches, has all the talk to himself. The other interlocutors are nothing more than good listeners. They drop an occasional question, or ejaculation, which sets Manfred off again on the inexhaustible topic of his personal feelings. If we examine the fine passages in Lord Byron's dramas,— the description of Rome, for example, in Manfred, — the description of a Venetian revel in Marino Faliero, — the dying invective which the old Doge pronounces against Venice, we shall find there is nothing dramatic in them; that they derive none of their effect from the character or situation of the speaker; and that they would have been as fine, or finer, if they had been published as fragments of blank verse by Lord Byron. There is scarcely a speech in Shakspeare of which the same could be said. No skilful reader of the plays of Shakspeare can endure to see what are called the fine things taken out, under the name of "Beauties" or of "Elegant Extracts;" or to hear any single passage,— "To be or not to be," for example,— quoted as a sample of the great poet. "To be or not to be," has merit undoubtedly as a composition. It would have merit if put into the mouth of a chorus. But its merit as a composition vanishes when compared with its merit as belonging to Hamlet. It is not too much to say that the great plays of Shakspeare would lose less by being deprived of all the passages which are commonly called the fine passages, than those passages lose by being read separately from the play. This is perhaps the highest praise which can be given to a dramatist.

On the other hand, it may be doubted whether there is, in all Lord Byron's plays, a single remarkable passage which owes any portion of its interest or effect to its connection with the characters or the action. He has written only one scene, as far as we can recollect, which is dramatic even in manner — the scene between Lucifer and Cain. The conference in that scene is animated, and each of the interlocutors has a fair share of it. But this scene, when examined, will be found to be a confirmation of our remarks. It is a dialogue only in form. It is a soliloquy in essence. It is in reality a debate carried on within one single unquiet and sceptical mind. The questions and the answers, the objections and the solutions, all belong to the same character.

A writer who showed so little of dramatic skill in works professedly dramatic, was not likely to write narrative with dramatic effect. Nothing could indeed be more rude and careless than the structure of his narrative poems. He seems to have thought, with the hero of the Rehearsal, that the plot was good for nothing but to bring in fine things. His two longest works, Childe Harold and Don Juan, have no plan whatever. Either of them might have been extended to any length, or cut short at any point. The state in which the Giaour appears, illustrates the manner in which all his poems were constructed. They are all, like the Giaour, collections of fragments; and though there may be no empty spaces marked by asterisks, it is still easy to perceive, by the clumsiness of the joining, where the parts, for the sake of which the whole was composed, end and begin.

It was in description and meditation that he excelled. "Description," as he said in Don Juan, "was his *forte*." His manner is indeed peculiar, and is almost unequalled, — rapid, sketchy, full of vigour; the selection happy; the strokes few and bold. In spite of the reverence which we feel for the genius of Mr. Wordsworth, we cannot but think that the minuteness of his descriptions often diminishes their effect. He has accustomed himself to gaze on nature with the eye of a lover — to dwell on every feature — and to mark every change of aspect. Those beauties which strike the most negligent observer, and those which only a close attention discovers, are equally familiar to him, and are equally prominent in his poetry. The proverb of old Hesiod, that half is often more than the whole, is eminently applicable to description. The policy of the Dutch, who cut down most of the precious trees in the Spice Islands, in order to raise the value of what remained, was a policy which poets would do well to imitate. It was a policy which no poet understood better than Lord Byron. Whatever his faults might be, he was never, while his mind retained its vigour, accused of prolixity.

His descriptions, great as was their intrinsic merit, derived their principal interest from the feeling which always mingled with them. He was himself the beginning, the middle, and the end of all his own poetry, — the hero of every tale — the chief object in every landscape. Harold, Lara, Manfred, and a crowd of other characters, were universally considered merely as loose incognitos of Byron; and there is every reason to believe that he meant them to be so considered. The wonders of the outer world — the Tagus, with the mighty fleets of England riding on its bosom — the towers of Cintra overhanging the shaggy forest of cork-trees and willows — the glaring marble of Pentelicus — the banks of the Rhine — the glaciers of Clarens — the sweet Lake of Leman — the dell of Egeria, with its summer-birds and rustling lizards — the shapeless ruins of Rome, overgrown with ivy and wall-flowers — the stars, the sea, the mountains; — all were mere accessories — the background to one dark and melancholy figure.

Never had any writer so vast a command of the whole eloquence of scorn, misanthropy, and despair. That Marah was never dry. No art could sweeten, no draughts could exhaust, its perennial waters of bitterness. Never was there such variety in monotony as that of Byron. From maniac laughter to piercing lamentation, there was not a single note of human anguish of which he was not master. Year after year, and month after month, he continued to repeat that to be wretched is the destiny of all; that to be eminently wretched, is the destiny of the eminent; that all the desires by which we are cursed lead alike to

misery; — if they are not gratified, to the misery of disappointment — if they are gratified, to the misery of satiety. His principal heroes are men who have arrived by different roads at the same goal of despair — who are sick of life — who are at war with society — who are supported in their anguish only by an unconquerable pride, resembling that of Prometheus on the rock, or of Satan in the burning marl; who can master their agonies by the force of their will, and who, to the last, defy the whole power of earth and heaven. He always described himself as a man of the same kind with his favourite creations, as a man whose heart had been withered — whose capacity for happiness was gone, and could not be restored; but whose invincible spirit dared the worst that could befall him, here or hereafter.

How much of this morbid feeling sprung from an original disease of the mind — how much from real misfortune — how much from the nervousness of dissipation — how much of it was fanciful — how much of it was merely affected — it is impossible for us, and would probably have been impossible for the most intimate friends of Lord Byron, to decide. Whether there ever existed, or can ever exist, a person answering to the description which he gave of himself, may be doubted: but that he was not such a person is beyond all doubt. It is ridiculous to imagine that a man, whose mind was really imbued with scorn of his fellow-creatures, would have published three or four books every year in order to tell them so; or that a man, who could say with truth that he neither sought sympathy nor needed it, would have admitted all Europe to hear his farewell to his wife, and his blessings on his child. In the second canto of Childe Harold, he tells us that he is insensible to fame and obloquy —

> "Ill may such contest now the spirit move,
> Which heeds nor keen reproof nor partial praise."

Yet we know, on the best evidence, that, a day or two before he published these lines, he was greatly, indeed childishly, elated by the compliments paid to his maiden speech in the House of Lords.

We are far, however, from thinking that his sadness was altogether feigned. He was naturally a man of great sensibility — he had been ill educated — his feelings had been early exposed to sharp trials — he had been crossed in his boyish love — he had been mortified by the failure of his first literary efforts — he was straitened in pecuniary circumstances — he was unfortunate in his domestic relations — the public treated him with cruel injustice — his health and spirits suffered from his dissipated habits of life — he was, on the whole, an unhappy man. He early discovered that, by parading his unhappiness before the multitude, he excited an unrivalled interest. The world gave him every encouragement to talk about his mental sufferings. The effect which his first confessions produced, induced him to affect much that he did not feel; and the affectation probably reacted on his feelings. How far the character in which he exhibited himself was genuine, and how far theatrical, would probably have puzzled himself to say.

There can be no doubt that this remarkable man owed the vast influence which he exercised over his contemporaries, at least as much to his gloomy egotism as to the real power of his poetry. We never could very clearly understand how it is that egotism, so unpopular in conversation, should be so popular in writing; or how it is that men who affect in their compositions qualities and feelings which they have not, impose so much

more easily on their contemporaries than on posterity. The interest which the loves of Petrarch excited in his own time, and the pitying fondness with which half Europe looked upon Rousseau, are well known. To readers of our time, the love of Petrarch seems to have been love of that kind which breaks no hearts; and the sufferings of Rousseau to have deserved laughter rather than pity — to have been partly counterfeited, and partly the consequences of his own perverseness and vanity.

What our grandchildren may think of the character of Lord Byron, as exhibited in his poetry, we will not pretend to guess. It is certain, that the interest which he excited during his life is without a parallel in literary history. The feeling with which young readers of poetry regarded him, can be conceived only by those who have experienced it. To people who are unacquainted with real calamity, "nothing is so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy." This faint image of sorrow has in all ages been considered by young gentlemen as an agreeable excitement. Old gentlemen, and middle-aged gentlemen, have so many real causes of sadness, that they are rarely inclined "to be as sad as night only for wantonness." Indeed they want the power almost as much as the inclination. We know very few persons engaged in active life, who, even if they were to procure stools to be melancholy upon, and were to sit down with all the premeditation of Master Stephen, would be able to enjoy much of what somebody calls the "ecstasy of woe."

Among that large class of young persons whose reading is almost entirely confined to works of imagination, the popularity of Lord Byron was unbounded. They bought pictures of him; they treasured up the smallest relics of him; they learned his poems by heart, and did their best to write like him, and to look like him. Many of them practised at the glass, in the hope of catching the curl of the upper lip, and the scowl of the brow, which appear in some of his portraits. A few discarded their neckcloths, in imitation of their great leader. For some years the Minerva press sent forth no novel without a mysterious, unhappy, Lara-like peer. The number of hopeful undergraduates and medical students who became things of dark imaginings, — on whom the freshness of the heart ceased to fall like dew, — whose passions had consumed themselves to dust, and to whom the relief of tears was denied, passes all calculation. This was not the worst. There was created in the minds of many of these enthusiasts, a pernicious and absurd association between intellectual power and moral depravity. From the poetry of Lord Byron they drew a system of ethics, compounded of misanthropy and voluptuousness; a system in which the two great commandments were, to hate your neighbour, and to love your neighbour's wife.

This affectation has passed away; and a few more years will destroy whatever yet remains of that magical potency which once belonged to the name of Byron. To us he is still a man, young, noble, and unhappy. To our children he will be merely a writer; and their impartial judgment will appoint his place among writers, without regard to his rank, or to his private history. That his poetry will undergo a severe sifting; that much of what has been admired by his contemporaries will be rejected as worthless, we have little doubt. But we have as little doubt, that, after the closest scrutiny, there will still remain much that can only perish with the English language.

SOUTHEY'S UNEDUCATED POETS.*

Mr. Southey's Introductory Essay on the Lives and Works of our Uneducated Poets is ushered in with the singular observation, that "As the age of Reason had commenced, and we were advancing with quick step in the March of Intellect, Mr. Jones would in all likelihood be the last versifier of his class; and something might properly be said of his predecessors, the poets in low life, who, with more or less good fortune, had obtained notice in their day." By "the March of Intellect," in the above sentence, is meant, we presume, not merely the progress of scientific improvement, but the more general diffusion of knowledge among the poorer classes. To find this diffusion of knowledge spoken of in distasteful terms by Mr. Southey, can surprise no one who is acquainted with the writings of that gentleman. Yet even to these it must seem extraordinary to discover such reproachful expressions in a work, the tendency of which is to encourage, among the working classes, a pursuit which demands a very high degree of mental cultivation. The prediction above quoted, that such a diffusion of knowledge is likely to prevent the future appearance of versifiers in humble life, is one which we should hardly have thought necessary to notice seriously, if it had come from a pen of less influence than Mr. Southey's. His proposition, translated into plain unfigurative language, is, that the more the poor are educated, the less are they likely to write poetry. In the first place, we disbelieve the predicted result; and, secondly, we say, that if true, it is not a subject for regret, as it is evidently considered by Mr. Southey. It seems almost a waste of words to confute so untenable a theory as that education is unfavourable to the developement of poetical talent. The rare occurrence of uneducated poets, and the wonder excited by their appearance, — the indispensableness of something more than the mere rudiments of education to afford to the incipient poet a competent store of the materials with which he works, — the fact, that our most distinguished poets have almost uniformly been men of studious habits, and of various and extensive reading — of which we have an example in the Laureate himself, — these are circumstances on which it is needless to enlarge — which, when heard, must be acknowledged, and when acknowledged, must convince; and we gladly close this part of an argument, in which the humblest disputant could gain no honour by confuting even the editor of the work before us. Indeed, it can scarcely be imagined that Mr. Southey could seriously maintain such an opinion; and that he must mean rather, that the poor who receive the advantages of education will, at the same time, learn to apply their acquirements to more useful purposes than writing verses. But there is this difficulty in such a supposition, — that a reproach would thereby be cast upon the practice of versifying, which Mr. Southey is very far from intending; and it is evident, from the tone of his book, that he does not contemplate with the pleasure which it ought to afford to a benevolent mind like his, the prospect of the poorer classes being inclined to apply the fruits of their extended education to works of practical utility. We must therefore conclude, that he does not believe that the condition of the poor will be improved by such an education as

* Attempts in Verse, by John Jones, an old Servant; with some Account of the Writer, written by himself; and an Introductory Essay on the Lives and Works of Uneducated Poets. By Robert Southey, Esq., Poet Laureate. 8vo. London: 1831. — Vol. liv. p. 69. September, 1831.

will induce them to apply their acquired knowledge to purposes which are commonly called *useful;* but that it is better either to keep them ignorant, or to give them just so much information as will encourage a developement of the imaginative or poetical part of their nature, without awakening them, more than can be helped, to any exercise of their reasoning powers. If this is not what is intended, then the praise bestowed upon uneducated poets, the encouraging complacency with which their efforts are regarded, and the sarcastic allusions to the Age of Reason and the March of Intellect, which is to arrest the progress of such commendable efforts, are utterly without a meaning.

But a writer who feels so strongly as Mr. Southey, can never, even when he is least logical, be accused of writing without a meaning. Mr. Southey, both in this, and in other writings in which his ideas are more distinctly expressed, teaches us that poetry softens and humanizes the heart of man, while it is the tendency of science to harden and corrupt it. It would be useless to plead that Mr. Southey may never have expressed this sentiment in these precise words, while he has written much from which no other inference can be drawn.

According to this theory, the poor man who has a turn for versifying is likely to be more moral than one who discovers a bent for calculation or mechanics; a cultivation of the former talent will tend to constitute a pious man and a good subject, — the latter, if encouraged, may too probably lead to republicanism and irreligion. A labourer may write lines on a linnet, and be praised for this amiable exercise of his humble talent; but if he reads any of the cheap works on science with which the press now teems, — if he presumes to learn the scientific name of his favourite bird, — to consider its relation to other birds, — to know that it belongs to the genus *Fringilla*, and to ascertain the marks by which he might distinguish the name of any wandering stranger of the same tribe that happened to fall within his notice, — if he does this, then he becomes a naturalist, a scientific enquirer — and, as such, must fall under the ban of Mr. Southey. Let him apostrophize a flower in rhyme, but let him not learn its botanical name, or more of its properties than can be extracted from the Galenical lore of the oldest woman in the parish: he finds a fossil bone; — let him pen a sonnet about it if he pleases; but let him beware of consulting a geologist, lest he become a hardy sceptic, — doubt if there ever was a deluge, and question the Mosaic account of the creation. Utterly do we reprobate and disavow the doctrine, that it is otherwise than beneficial for minds of every degree to be rendered intimate with the mysteries of nature, — that the study of nature can be injurious to the morality and religious faith of any man whose morality and faith would have been safe without it, — that the faith of the rustic who believes that the sun moves round the earth, and that the stars are small lamps, is more devout and pure than that of the same man would be when informed of the real sublimity of the scene around him. It is a doctrine of which any illustration is equivalent to a *reductio ad absurdum.* It is very natural that the Poet Laureate should think well of poetry. Some persons may smile at such an illustration of a propensity which they may have thought peculiar to humbler callings, — namely, that of attributing to a production or pursuit many more excellent qualities and advantages than can be discovered in it by the rest of the world; and they may have expected that a very cultivated mind would have soared above a prejudice of this description. Mr. Southey recommends poetry as eminently favourable to morality, and considers that every amiable

man "will be both the better and the happier for writing verses." Mr. Southey is a celebrated poet, and is, we believe, at the same time, a very pious and amiable man. It is therefore not unnatural that a talent for poetry should be associated in his mind with piety and morality; but if he thinks that they are necessarily connected, and that poetry is naturally conducive to those other more important qualities, he must attend rather to his own feelings than to the examples which experience would furnish. It would be an invidious, but easy task, to form a long list of men richly endowed with the gift of poetry, in whom pure morality and religious faith had been too notoriously deficient. It is unnecessary to mention names, for many — and enough — must occur to every reader; but we must remind Mr. Southey that the brightest name among the "uneducated poets" of this empire is that of one whose imagination and passions were unfortunately often too strong for the control of his judgment, and to whom the inborn gift of poetry, which he so exuberantly possessed, far from leading him into the paths of morality and peace, seem rather to have been false lights that lured him from them. It is the province of poetry to appeal to the passions rather than to the judgment; and the passions are the most erring part of human nature. Mr. Southey does not seem to reckon among possible contingencies the immoral direction of poetical talent. It is true, the verse-making rustic may celebrate the simple virtues which poets associate with rural life, and draw moral lessons from the contemplation of nature, but he may equally dedicate his muse to the unhallowed task of lending a baneful interest to violence and crime. A reverence for antiquity, for social distinctions, and for the established order of things, are not necessary concomitants of an aptitude for verse. Liberty, the watchword under which rebellion always marches, has a spirit-stirring sound, especially to young and ardent minds, in which imagination prevails over judgment; and the lyre of the poet will echo as readily to its call as to images of pastoral peace. Mr. Southey must remember that even *he* once celebrated Wat Tyler. Anarchy has its laureate as well as monarchy, and the strains of the former are commonly most popular. A reference to his notice of the uneducated poets whom he has selected for celebration, will show that their versifying powers were not always exercised in a commendable manner. Taylor's contests in ribaldry with Fennor, another rhymer of humble life, were not creditable to either; and Bryant seems to have hung his satirical talent *in terrorem* over his associates, and to have allowed himself to be employed by one of them to lampoon the daughter of a respectable tradesman. We should be glad if it could have been proved that poetry is peculiarly conducive to morality; but we fear it cannot be shown that either the possession of the poetical faculty, or the perusal of works of that description, is calculated to ensure this desirable effect. To recommend poetry to the poorer classes, because there are in existence sundry moral poems which they would probably find among the least attractive, has little more sense in it, than to say that religious admonition is the peculiar attribute of prose, because sermons are written in that form. It matters not even though it could be shown that the *essentials* of poetry are akin to all that is most moral; for when we talk of poetry to the uneducated classes, they will think not of the essence, but only of the form. If the pursuit of poetry cannot be shown to be necessarily productive of moral benefit to persons in humble life, still less, we fear, can it be proved that it is calculated to ameliorate their worldly condition. We know no instance of any poor uneducated person whose prosperity and happiness

has been essentially promoted by the developement of this talent. Six persons of this class are commemorated in the volume before us. Taylor the Water-Poet, Stephen Duck, James Woodhouse, John Bennet, Ann Yearsley, and John Frederick Bryant — of whom two died mad; and all appear to have undergone severe trials, and to have been very little raised, by the possession of this talent, above the lowly sphere in which they were born. It is also observable, that all of them seem to have owed even the precarious prosperity which they occasionally enjoyed to fortunate accidents, and the charitable notice of their superiors in wealth. Bryant owed his advancement to a song of his own making, which he sang in an inn-kitchen — Ann Yearsley to the casual notice of Mrs. Hannah More, with whom she afterwards quarrelled — Woodhouse to the patronage of Shenstone — Bennet to that of Warton — Duck was patronized by various persons, and at last by Queen Caroline, who settled a pension upon him — Taylor was a supple, ready-witted humorist, well skilled in the art of living at other men's cost. Such was his proficiency in this art, that he undertook to travel on foot from London to Edinburgh, "not carrying any money to or fro; neither begging, borrowing, nor asking meat, drink, or lodging." This journey, he says, was undertaken "to make trial of his friends;" and we are informed by Mr. Southey that it was not an arduous one, "for he was at that time a well-known person; and he carried in his tongue a gift which, wherever he might be entertained, would be accepted as current payment for his entertainment." To this important and praiseworthy excursion, of which Taylor published an account in quaint prose, and quainter doggerel, entitled, "The Pennyless Pilgrimage, or the Moneyless Perambulations of John Taylor, *alias* the King's Majesty's Water-Poet," Mr. Southey devotes twenty-three pages of a small volume.

Our readers will naturally desire to see some specimens of a work which has attracted so much of the Laureate's attention. Of the following verses, we will merely say, that their excellence is quite of a piece with the importance of the information they convey. They describe Taylor's reception at Manchester.

"'Their loves they on the tenter-hooks did rack,
Roast, boil'd, baked, too-too-much, white, claret, sack;
Nothing they thought too heavy, or too hot,
Cann followed cann, and pot succeeded pot.
Thus what they could do, all they thought too little,
Striving in love the traveller to whittle.
We went into the house of one John Pinners
(A man that lives amongst a crew of sinners),
And there eight several sorts of ale we had,
All able to make one stark drunk, or mad.
But I with courage bravely flinched not,
And gave the town leave to discharge the shot.
We had at one time set upon the table,
Good ale of Hyssop ('twas no Esop-fable);
Then had we ale of Sage, and ale of Malt,
And ale of Wormwood that could make one halt;
With ale of Rosemary, and of Bettony,
And two ales more, or else I needs must lie.
But to conclude this drinking aley tale,
We had a sort of ale called Scurvy ale.
Thus all these men at their own charge and cost
Did strive whose love should be expressed most;
And farther to declare their boundless loves,
They saw I wanted, and they gave me, gloves.'

" Taylor makes another excursion ' from London to Christ Church, in Hampshire, and so up the Avon to Salisbury,' and this was ' for toyle, travail, and danger,' the worst and most difficult passage he had yet made. These desperate adventures did not answer the purpose for which they were undertaken, and he complains of this in what he calls (*Tayloricé*) the Scourge of Baseness, a Kicksey Winsey, or a Lerry-Come-Twang.

" ' I made my journey for no other ends
But to get money and to try my friends. —
They took a book worth twelve pence, and were bound
To give a crown, an angel, or a pound,
A noble, piece, or half-piece, — what they list:
They past their words, or freely set their fist.
Thus got I sixteen hundred hands and fifty,
Which sum I did suppose was somewhat thrifty;
And now my youths with shifts and tricks and cavils,
Above seven hundred, play the sharking javils.'

" The manner," says Mr. Southey, " in which he [Taylor] published his books, which were separately of little bulk, was to print them at his own cost, make presents of them, and then hope for ' sweet remuneration ' from the persons whom he had thus delighted to honour." The following passage is quoted from a dedication to Charles I., in which Taylor says, " My gracious sovereign, your majesty's poor undeserved servant, having formerly oftentimes presented to your highness many such pamphlets, the best fruits of my lean and steril invention, always your princely affability and bounty did express and manifest your royal and generous disposition; and your gracious father, of ever-blessed and famous memory, did not only like and encourage, but also more than reward the barren gleanings of my poetical inventions."

There is nothing extraordinary in this, when we consider that, even much later, men of acknowledged talent were not ashamed to write fulsome dedications; but it is a circumstance degrading to literature, and that part of its history which we would most gladly forget — and it is pitiable in this instance to see a man of no slight cleverness begging in such abject terms. The fact is, that all the uneducated poets whom Mr. Southey has noticed were, in a more or less degree, *literary mendicants*. They obtained from private charity that assistance which the public would not grant. Their productions were not of sufficient value to obtain remuneration on the score of intrinsic merit; and their rewards were wrung either from the pity of their benefactors, or from their wondering curiosity at the occurrence of so rare a monster as an uneducated poet. None of them really enjoyed the blessings of independence — the proud and happy feeling that their own exertions were sufficient for their support. Mr. Southey seems to contemplate this state of dependence with peculiar complacency. We are not very sure that he does not consider the spirit of the present age too independent, and that it might be improved by a gentle encouragement of that spirit of humble servility, which once prompted poor authors to ply rich patrons with begging dedications, and to look up with trembling hope for the casual bounty of those who possessed in abundance the good things of this life. The best and happiest times, it would seem, were those in which the poor begged for sustenance at the doors of a convent. Those which we call erroneously " the dark ages," were, it seems, the best times for the advancement of humble talent. Then a clever boy like Stephen Duck " would have been noticed by the monks of the nearest monastery — would

then have made his way to Oxford, or perhaps to Paris, as a begging scholar — have risen to be a bishop or mitred abbot — have done honour to his station, and have left behind him good works and a good name." Those were golden days! But then came a period which we benighted Protestants still call that of the Reformation, and Duck, who lived long after it, fell on harder times — but still not utterly cruel — for there were yet patrons in the land, and Duck found a royal one; and "the patronage which he obtained," says Mr. Southey, "is far more honourable to the spirit of his age, than the temper which may censure or ridicule it can be to ours." Whatever it may please Mr. Southey to consider the temper of our age, we, albeit reckoned among the infected, are not disposed to censure or ridicule the benevolent feelings which may prompt any one to become the patron of humble merit; but we do censure that maudlin spirit of shortsighted humanity, that fritters its beneficence in temporary and misplaced relief, and would thoughtlessly aggravate misfortune for the sake of indulging sensibility in its subsequent removal. It is the best charity to prevent the necessity of charitable assistance. Doubtless there is in the charitable alleviation of distress much that is gratifying to the heart of the benefactor, and much the contemplation of which is delightful to an amiable mind. But shall we therefore encourage mendicancy, that the world may teem with moving pictures of picturesque poverty and theatrical generosity to interest the sensibilities of the man of feeling? True rational humanity would not willingly see any one dependent upon the capricious bounty of another. Unable to reverse that general law, which prescribes labour as the lot of man, it endeavours to direct the labour of the poor into a channel where they may claim a recompence from the exigencies of others, and not from their compassion. It would endow them with a right to receive assistance, instead of teaching them to supplicate for alms. Mr. Southey would doubtless be unwilling to encourage idleness and mendicancy; but there is in reality little difference between encouraging men not to labour at all, but to depend for their support on the charity of others, and encouraging them to pursue a species of labour for which there is no real demand, and from which the only returns which they obtain are in reality alms, considerately cloaked under the fictitious name of a reward. We do not deny, that the public, though in general the best patron, sometimes awards a too tardy and insufficient recompence to the literary benefactors of mankind; and in such instances we deem it right that the powerful and discerning few should be enabled to direct the stream of national bounty to the encouragement and reward of labours which the acquirements and comprehension of the generality of mankind do not enable them to appreciate. But widely different from this truly praiseworthy patronage is the disposition to encourage works which are neither beautiful nor useful, and whose only claim (if claim it can be called) is the temporary interest they may offer to the curious, and the compassionate consideration that they are wonderfully good, for writings that were produced under such disadvantages.

Experience does not authorize us to regard it as probable, that the world will be favoured with any poetry of very exalted merit from persons in humble life and of defective education. There have appeared, among uneducated persons, many instances of extraordinary capacity for various sciences and pursuits. The science of numbers, of mechanics, of language, of music, painting, sculpture, architecture, have all had followers in humble life, who have discovered a strong native genius for

each of these separate branches of art and learning, and have risen to eminence in their peculiar line. But poetry is not equally rich in examples of successful votaries from the ranks of the poor. Not one of the six writers recorded by Mr. Southey can be regarded as a successful example; for nothing but the scarcity of such instances could have preserved them, like other valueless rarities, from the oblivion into which, notwithstanding even the embalming power of Mr. Southey's pen, they are fated at no very distant period to fall. It would appear, either that habits of manual labour are unfavourable to poetry, or that a talent for it is less inborn than acquired, or that it is much affected by external circumstances, or that a considerable degree of education is essential to its full developement. To which of these causes we may attribute the dearth of distinguished poets from the humbler walks of life, it is not at present necessary to enquire. The fact of such a paucity is sufficient for our purpose; and it is an additional argument against encouraging the poor and defectively educated to lend their minds to a pursuit in which the presumption of success is so considerably against them. Unless they happen to possess such powerful native talent, as it is needless to encourage and impossible to suppress, they are not likely to produce such writings as will obtain them advancement and success — real, unforced, unpatronised success, — the success which arises from the delight and admiration of thousands, and not from the casual benevolence of individual patronage.

It might have been supposed, that of all things in the world which are not immoral, one of the least deserving encouragement was indifferent poetry. Mr. Southey nevertheless protests indignantly against this opinion. "When," says he, "it is laid down as a maxim of philosophical criticism, that poetry ought never to be encouraged unless it is excellent in its kind — that it is an art in which inferior execution is not to be tolerated — a luxury, and must therefore be rejected unless it is of the very best; such reasoning may be addressed with success to cockered and sickly intellects, but it will never impose upon a healthy understanding, a generous spirit, or a good heart." Mr. Southey, with that poetical tendency to metaphor which sometimes possesses him when he appears to reason, seems to have written the above passage under the influence of rather a forced analogy between the digestive powers of the human frame and the operations of the mind. If in the above remarks we substitute "food" for "poetry," "appetite" for "intellect," and "the stomach" for "the understanding," much of what Mr. Southey has predicated will undoubtedly be true; since it is certain that a perfectly healthy person can eat with impunity many kinds of food that cannot be taken by one who is sickly. It is a sign of bodily health to be able to digest coarse food which cannot be eaten by the invalid; and in like manner, according to Mr. Southey, it is the sign of a "healthy understanding" to be able to tolerate bad verses which would be rejected by a "sickly intellect." Mr. Southey may very probably have accustomed himself to talk of poetry as "food for the mind," till he has learned to confound the immaterial with the substantial; but we must remind him of one great failure in the parallel on which he appears to lean. It will not, we suppose, be denied, that the mind, and especially that faculty which enables us to judge of the excellence of poetry, requires cultivation, without which it cannot exercise its functions effectively; but we have never yet heard of any such cultivation of the digestive powers. If man were born as decidedly a criticising and poetry-reading as he is an eating

and drinking animal, and were likely to possess these faculties in most perfection in an unsophisticated state of nature, we should then allow that there would be much force in the observations of Mr. Southey. But the reverse of this is notoriously the case. Our power of estimating poetry is in a great degree acquired. The boy with an innate taste for poetry, who first finds a copy of bellman's verses, is pleased with the jingle, and thinks the wretched doggerel excellent. He soon finds better verses, and becomes ashamed of the objects of his earliest admiration. In course of time a volume of Pope or Milton falls in his way, and he becomes sensible of what is really excellent in poetry, and learns to distinguish it from that which, although not positively bad, is common-place and of subordinate merit. Is this boy's mind, we ask, in a less healthy state at this advanced period of his critical discernment, than when he thought the bellman's verses excellent? or has his "intellect" been rendered "sickly" by the dainty fare with which his mental tastes have latterly been pampered?

But the encouragement of inferior poetry is, according to Mr. Southey, a sign not only of "a healthy understanding," but of "a generous spirit" and a "good heart." If Mr. Southey means that indulgence towards the failings of others, and a disposition to look leniently upon their imperfect productions, are the results of generosity and goodness of heart, we thoroughly agree with him; but it is not merely indulgence for which he contends, it is *encouragement*. Now, though it is impossible to prove a negative, and it is very possible that the encourager of bad verses may be at the same time very generous and good-hearted, yet there is no necessary connection between that practice and those moral qualities; any more than it is necessarily a sign of generosity and a good heart to deal only with inferior tradesmen, and buy nothing but the worst commodities. A person who should be thus amiably content to buy bad things when he might have better, would, we fear, be considered a fool for his pains, even by those whom he permitted to supply him; and we cannot think that the encourager of bad poetry would remain long exempted from a similar censure. It is useless, we might almost say mischievous, to maintain that any thing ought to be "encouraged" that is not excellent in its kind. Let those who have not arrived at excellence be encouraged to proceed, and to exert themselves, in order that they may attain it. This is good and praiseworthy encouragement; but let it be remembered, that this good purpose cannot be effected but by mingling with the exhortation to future exertions an unqualified censure of present imperfections. This, the only sound and rational encouragement, is directly opposed to that lenient tolerance of "inferior execution," which appears to receive the commendation of Mr. Southey. Men are encouraged to do really well, not by making them satisfied with their present mediocrity, but by exhibiting it to them in the true light, and stimulating them to higher excellence. Whatever may be speciously said about the virtues of charity and contentment, we may be assured that he is no benefactor of the human race who would teach us to be satisfied with inferior excellence in any thing, while higher excellence is attainable.

Among the statements which we are told can be addressed with success only "to *cockered* and sickly intellects," is this,—that poetry is a luxury, and must therefore be rejected unless it is "of the very best." It is needless to discuss this question at much length. It may be natural for the lover of poetry to contend that it is something much better and more important than a luxury, but it is nevertheless treated as such by

the world at large, and we fear that nothing that can be said will induce the public to regard poetry in any other light. All the most important business of life is transacted in prose — all the most important lessons of religion and morality are inculcated in prose — we reason in prose — we argue in prose — we harangue in prose. There were times when laws were chanted, and Orpheus and Amphion were, it is believed, poetical legislators, as were almost all legislators, among barbarous people, whose reason must be addressed through the medium of their imagination. But these times are past recall; and we fear, whatever it may be contended poetry ought to be, Mr. Southey must be contented with the place which it actually occupies. That place is both honourable and popular; and it will not conduce to its success to claim for it more than is its due.

In conclusion, we must say, that much as we have differed from Mr. Southey, we have been glad to see that he is inclined to look with favour upon the mental labours of the poorer classes. We trust that his agreeable pen will be hereafter exercised in their behalf; but with this material difference, — that instead of luring them into the flowery region of poetry, he will rather teach them to cultivate pursuits which are more in harmony with their daily habits, and to prefer the useful to the ornamental.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

London:
Printed by A. & R. Spottiswoode.
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